Film Quarterly

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CLAIRE DENIS: *35 SHOTS OF RUM*

CHRIS MARKER: *A GRIN WITHOUT A CAT*

ALAN BALL: *TRUE BLOOD*

Winter 2009–10 Volume 63 Number 2
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FILM QUARTERLY

THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX, THE H-MAN

Volume 63 Number 2

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FUGITIVE EXPRESSIONS

Ne change rien (Pedro Costa)

The Pedro Costa retrospective (September 25–October 4) at London's Tate Modern was admirably curated. In addition to eight films by this brilliant Portuguese director, other works were screened to provide context, background, or food for thought, including *Sicilia!* by Jean-Marie Straub and the late Danièle Huillet; *Routine Pleasures* by Jean-Pierre Gorin; and *The Pig*, Jean Eustache and Jean-Michel Barjol's stunning account of open-air village butchery. Costa personally introduced *In Vanda's Room* and *Ne change rien*, his new film, and took part in two on-stage discussions with Gorin. An accompanying color booklet included "The Politics of Pedro Costa," a superb analysis by the French philosopher, Jacques Rancière.

Costa's style is elliptical. In *Colossal Youth*, which James Naremore selected as his film of the year in the summer 2008 issue, much of the world is blocked off. No Lisbon skyline, shop, or urban bustle is glimpsed; with the exception of the climactic shot, we never see streets and traffic. As Rancière notes, Costa omits to "inscribe the slums into the landscape of capitalism." Which is not to say that *Colossal Youth* avoids politics, but its characters—played by local nonprofessionals—cannot be solely defined in terms of a downtrodden position in the hierarchy of wealth and power. Their looming presence and in particular their ceremonious speech are too challenging and cryptic to be thought of as subaltern. Rancière refers to an "exercise in approximating the secret of the other," for what is at stake is the manner in which "people relegated to the margins of economic circulations and social trajectories try to be ciphered in new figures."

A music documentary, *Ne change rien* is unlike the Lisbon films in crucial respects, but it is also a chamber piece. It follows the actress Jeanne Balibar in her other career as pop chanteuse and opera singer. *Ne change rien* began as an act of friendship, a diaristic gift, until one day Costa adjusted the color setting of his video playback and saw the images differently: "something appeared in black-and-white that was not there in color," he tells James Hansen. "The veins, the nerves—it was more sensual, more physical. Even her skin began to show things." So an enigmatic expressiveness connects this film to *Colossal Youth*. *Ne change rien* is furthermore a sequel to *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*, Costa's sketch of Huillet and Straub editing *Sicilia!* In this low-key take on the "making of" genre, the camera is often placed in a corner of the tiny work-room. We hardly ever discern the faces of the filmmakers and when we do they are shrouded in shadow, peripheral objects in relation to the inset actors on the bright monitor. Taciturn Huillet mostly has her back to the camera, concentrating on the screen or handling film, while Straub paces in and out of the open door, always chattering. Her compact stillness, his flibbertigibbet mobility; her curtness and reticence, his long-winded ruminations. The couple's working method emerges through sound and in the almost abstract configuration of his wandering and her fixity. At one point, Straub settles down next to the camera, off-screen, but his hands flutter in and out of the frame like a flag in the wind.

In *Ne change rien*, by contrast, there are extended close-ups of Balibar, most memorably as she practices an aria from Offenbach's *La Périchole*, stopping and starting—rather like Huillet at the editing table—as her out-of-sight teacher warmly coaxes and corrects. At other times Balibar is off-screen, though audible, and instead we see fellow musicians, especially the guitarist and songwriter Rodolphe Burger, who watches her protectively. During Offenbach rehearsals, the view is restricted to the birdlike accompanist staring out of frame, mesmerized by the singers. Separating Balibar from her collaborators like this, Costa represents musical performance as a paradoxically dislocated kind of intimacy. It is a fascinating variant on, even a deconstruction of, the conventional concert film. In keeping with the suggestion that music is a kind of depersonalizing magnetism, the performers speak politely to one another. Balibar mentions near the end that she once worked as a waitress. That this banal revelation should be notable is due to the absence of the familiar backstage bantering and tantrums.

Both these meticulous documentaries dwell on the painstaking process of creative collaboration. Huillet reproaches her garrulous colleague and lover at one moment: "all this time we've been editing films together," she says, "you still don't have the discipline!" It is an arduous business. It makes great demands on its participants. Doubt and fatigue creep in. All through *Ne change rien*, Balibar struggles with the tempo of songs. Ultimately, she falters a little. "Maybe I shouldn't even focus on the rhythm," she says to Burger.

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A paradoxical intimacy

Top: *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* © 2001 AMIP, Contracosta, Arte France, INA. DVD: Intermedio (Spain). Bottom: *Ne change rien*. Photos: www.pedro-costa.net.

Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie? closes with Straub sitting down on the staircase outside a cinema auditorium where he has been addressing the audience. Quiet for once, he obscures his face with his hand. Suddenly his presence is statuesque and mysterious—conveying again a sense, however approximate, of "the secret of the other."

⁂

The new DVD edition of *A Grin Without a Cat* (*Le Fond de l'air est rouge*, released in 1978, re-edited in 1993), Chris Marker's chronicle of the New Left, is a cause for celebration and the occasion for essays by Nina Power and Mark Sinker. The English title comes from chapter 6 of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, after the Cheshire Cat vanishes: "'I've often seen a cat without a grin,' thought Alice, 'but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!'" Marker uses the phrase in the film to describe an identity crisis that beset the 1960s Latin American revolutionary Left after the Communist Party of Venezuela's 1965 decision not to support Douglas Bravo's guerilla tactics. Vanguard groups increasingly became isolated, "a spearhead without a spear, a grin without a cat."

In "Sixties," a 2008 text published with the DVD, Marker links the problem of disunity both to Che Guevara's tenet that revolutionaries be "violent, selective and cold killing machines," and to the fancies of intellectuals out of harm's way. "I remember my last conversation with [Louis] Althusser. He was back from Portugal in full 'Carnation Revolution'"—so the meeting must have occurred in 1974—"and this time, that was it! After many failed outbursts, including our month of May, Portugal was about to carry out the first socialist revolution since 1917, consolidate it and from there spread it to the whole of Europe. I listened to him as in zero-gravity. Facing me was not a likeable young leftist nut, but one of the greatest French intellectuals of his time. For him, as for others, Revolution was in the air, and had to be, like the Grin of the Cheshire Cat. He would always see that grin. And he wouldn't (nor would anyone) ever see the Cat."

The Lewis Carroll citation is not frivolous, but its nursery-rhyme phrasing puts a sideways swerve on radical history. Marker's use of literary language to couch cautionary sentiments is comparable to the street poetry of a dissenting statement made by a Black Panther leader, Fred Hampton,

in 1968 (included in the 2002 documentary, *The Weather Underground*): "We believe that the Weatherman action is anarchistic, opportunistic, individualistic. It's chauvinistic, it's Custeristic and that's the bad part about it. It's Custeristic in that its leaders take the people into situations where the people can be massacred and they call that revolution. It's nothing but child's play, it's folly," he says. "We think these people may be sincere, but they're misguided, they're muddleheads and they're scatterbrains." In both instances, the serious teasing subverts the imperiousness of militant manifestoes without repudiating their premises.

A Grin Without a Cat has a voiceover written by Marker, but spoken by different narrators (including Régis Debray, Yves Montand, and Simone Signoret in the French version), which emphasizes its will-o'-the-wisp essayistic fluidity, by turns factual and metaphorical, witty and bitter. The film needs several viewings because it is hard to pin down, peripatetic and unruly rather than didactic—although it was not always characterized in this way. When it was first shown in France, some found the film high-handed, doctrinaire. In its January 1978 issue, *Cahiers du Cinéma* published a round table on *A Grin Without a Cat* (translated in *Cahiers du Cinéma, Volume 4: 1973–1978*, edited by David Wilson), in which Jean Narboni voices a discontented majority opinion: "the film of a spiritual adviser, a morose instructor of the Communists and the traditional left." He reserves special scorn for the sequence showing how Fidel Castro's habit of adjusting microphones during speeches was confounded in front of a Soviet audience because, to the Cuban prime minister's discomfort, the objects on this occasion would not budge. The often-cited sequence is very funny, but it follows on from shaky footage of Castro endorsing the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Narboni is annoyed: "Well, of course, we see this awfulness in the film and that's good. But then at the end it's all made up for, blurred, forgotten, because in the USSR Castro bumps into microphones that won't bend. Everyone laughs, and we're on Castro's side against those naughty, stiff Soviet microphones."

I wonder. Are such things so easily erased? In his own fashion—with a feline jump rather than dogmatic table-thumping—Marker moves away from the chilling oratory, leaving to hang not a grin, but Castro's uncharacteristically perplexed and timid expression as he fails to twist the mikes. The technological digression is not played just for laughs; if we smile, it does not mean we avoid judging the extent to which Castro's expression may encapsulate betrayal more concisely than the complicit words. "The devil of history," Power writes, "lies in the details." Marker's editing jogs us into thinking carefully. We are not lulled or dragged along. The director's own account of *A Grin Without a Cat* (quoted by Sarah Cooper in her 2008 book on Marker) seems to me to be fully justified: "I am not boasting that I have succeeded in making a dialectical film. But I have tried for once (having in my time frequently abused the power of the directive commentary) to give back to the spectator, through montage, 'his' commentary, that is, his power."

⁂

The "first generation" terrorist campaign conducted in the early 1970s by the Red Army Faction (often initially called the Baader-Meinhof Gang after two of its members, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof) has been the subject of numerous German films. (It crops up elsewhere as well. In the recent French true-crime thriller, *Mesrine: Public Enemy*, the eponymous bank robber is surrounded by police. "I'm with the Baader-Meinhof Gang," he shouts facetiously from inside the apartment, "long live the revolution!") The latest, *Long Shadows* and *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, are discussed by Christina Gerhardt. As she observes, *The Baader Meinhof Complex* recreates various incidents that are well-known from photographs, notably the killing of demonstrator Benno Ohnesorg by a policeman during the 1967 Berlin street protest against the state visit of the Shah of Iran. As if to emphasize his film's impartial detachment, director Uli Edel shows a camera operator standing over the dying man. Likewise, at other times Edel cuts between reenactments of monumental events and shots of photographers. A young girl with an Instamatic looks down on the garage where Baader and Holger Meins are besieged; a whole press pack records the funeral of Meins.

Yet consider what happens to one photo of Meinhof. After she goes on the run, having assisted in Baader's successful prison break, an eyes-downcast snapshot of her is seen on a TV set watched by her former colleagues at the office of *Konkret* magazine. The same image reappears first as a printed byline portrait, then on a wanted-for-attempted-murder poster being pasted onto a wall. (The poster is iconic, featuring in *A Grin Without a Cat* and as the centerpiece of Astrid Proll's book, *Baader Meinhof: Pictures on the Run*, 67–77. Edel has reconstructed it too: the red lettering is bright, the paper unfoxed, and Meinhof's face has been replaced with a subtly similar likeness of actress Martina Gedeck.) The series concludes later with side-by-side most-wanted photos of Baader and Meinhof filling the screen unobstructed, no onlooker present in the scene. And there is a further development: a pen has crossed through each image. The framing of the mugshots now implies the point of view of a law-enforcement official whose "X" stands for capture. A comparison is invited with Fritz Lang's *M*—where a murder poster scruti-

Most wanted

Top left: *M*. © 1931 Nero-Film AG. DVD: Eureka (U.K.). Top right: *A Grin Without a Cat*. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. DVD: Icarus Films.
Others: *The Baader Meinhof Complex*. © 2008 Constantin Film Produktion GMBH, Nouvelles Éditions de Film S.A., G.T. Film Production S.R.O. DVD: Constantin Film (Germany).

nized by a crowd is a prelude to close-up imagery from the manhunt (fingerprint, handwriting sample, street map).

Another useful reference point is the most famous treatment of the "German Autumn," Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977* series of pictures. The monochrome sequence consists of copies of photos that have been "overpainted" so it appears as if the originals had been deep-frozen. "All the pictures are dull, grey, mostly very blurred, diffuse," as Richter puts it. "Their presence is the horror and the hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion" ("Notes for a Press Conference, November–December 1989," in *Gerhard Richter—Text: Writings, Interviews and Letters, 1961–2007*, edited by Dietmar Elger and Hans Ulrich Obrist). His refashioning of archival images entails distancing, an impairment of photographic immediacy. It is antithetical to the approach taken by *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, which seeks to intensify and supplement the impact of the visual record. The movie "delivers the images between the images that one already knows," according to Edel, and it is interesting that his strategy of recuperation and proliferation should lock down the narrative viewpoint so that it seems aligned not with civilian observation, but with a cold and purposeful bureaucratic gaze.

Rob White

ALLEGORY BOMB

***District 9* (Neill Blomkamp)**
***The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow)**

District 9 and *The Hurt Locker*, two of the summer's most unsettling films, test the limits of allegory.

The former is science fiction, most conducive to allegorical understanding: the genre of "cognitive estrangement," per Darko Suvin, *cognitive* for its rational extrapolations, *estrangement* for how these possible futures make the present newly visible.

Its trailer assertively amplifies such expectations. The South African settings and accents emphatically suggest that *District 9* will be a neat allegory of apartheid, with the marooned race of repulsive and sad-sack aliens standing for the dispossessed. The off-screen publicity campaign extends this line: to choose only one example, huge placards mounted on public buses display the film's title and the stern warning, FOR HUMANS ONLY.

Rarely has a film broken its promises so resolutely and so variously. Though there are elements of apartheid's history mixed throughout the movie—as with the forced relocation of the aliens from Johannesburg to distant townships—that history doesn't provide a consistent or coherent structure. If there's an allegory, it perhaps concerns superfluous populations in general: the endemic ghettoization of the global south described in Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums*, wherein millions upon millions of souls unneeded by the labor market pile up at the fringes of megacities from Dhaka to São Paulo, excluded from the late-modern marketplace and trapped in a half-world of informal economies, violence, and endless abjection. In *District 9*, the aliens get strung out on cat food (sold, along with a weapons trade, by caricaturally voodoo Nigerians, equally enthralled with black markets and black magic).

Having started as a thoughtful (or at least "thoughtful") faux-documentary, the film lapses rather shortly into the action idiom. This has annoyed numerous commenters, drawn by the promise of nuance and liberal position-taking, disappointed by the formulaic banality of mere genre fare.

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But it's fab genre fare. It achieves its intensity via further qualities elided in the trailer. It's relentlessly and disgustingly violent, leaving few pauses for breath or thoughtful nods. Amid the gross kinesis, the obliteration of human and alien bodies eloquently combines the abruptness of disposability (consonant not just with SF action but the logic of surplus population) and viscerally tuned effects (the sound design is particularly persuasive).

This is only the base of the film's grotesque landscape. At its apex, the ambiguous hero Wikus Van De Merwe (Sharlto Copley)—who, having been spattered with alien effluvium in his role as relocation bureaucrat, undergoes a conversion of sorts—is captured by the Nigerians. Via some primitivist logic (or perhaps a reading of Bataille) they commence to eat pieces of his now-alien arm, carving off living hunks with a knife. By this juncture, out-horrifying any of the season's body-horror flicks, *District 9* has left its think-piece come-hithers in the ichor and goo of a thousand wasted, blasted bodies.

None of this forecloses allegory. What does is the impossibility of establishing who the aliens "really are"; it can only be allegory, after all, if they stand in the place of some identifiable group. The apartheid allegory never comes together; neither does the superfluous population theory explain quite enough. It's not a film of insitutional racism nor capitalist crisis. What is finally interesting, even compelling, about *District 9*, is that it seems to dislike pretty much every human, and human position, it can conjure up; if the aliens represent some fraction of humanity, well, it doesn't like them much either. It's driven not by cognitive estrangement, not by analytic displacements, but by a profound and remorseless contempt for present humanity—including the humanist desires of the audience it hails. It's surely the most Nietzschean film of the decade.

Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* is a war movie, a genre compelled to be about itself, allegory for nothing. (This rule is not absolute: surely Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* is allegory for something. Sources differ on what.) In some way it's a double for *Stop-Loss*, which followed first a few men who, souls infected with war, couldn't bear to go back nor survive being away. Kimberly Peirce's 2008 film was set in the home theater; *The Hurt Locker* plays out in the Middle East, following an explosives disposal team in Iraq.

Somewhat Nietzschean

Left: *District 9*. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Releasing. Right: *The Hurt Locker*. Courtesy of Summit Entertainment.

Bomb-squad savant William James (Jeremy Renner) is not a little Nietzschean: far beyond morals, unconstrained by such mewling matters as fear of death. This does not make him free, but he is able to act—and in the ambiguous lens of war, this makes a hero. To be the hero he must be beyond calculus—while his squad mates, and the audience, are compelled to nothing but. Does he have some driving demons where his self-preservation instinct should be? Has he cost more lives than he saves? Do we care if he lives or dies, where he does not?

Even his one avenue of sentiment—an attachment to a local boy known as Beckham—proves a blind alley. The seeming murder and misuse of the boy provokes James, supported by his increasingly unwilling team, into an adrenalin-soaked commando raid on a local family, which ends disastrously. But this is enough for James; when he later encounters Beckham alive and well, he registers nothing. The boy has served his purpose, a mute justification for another visit to the firefight. Everything contrives to be an excuse for the kicks of combat. This isn't an allegory, exactly—a holographic miniature, rather, of a larger story about the war.

This case is made more persuasively via the episodic aimlessness of David Simon's *Generation Kill*: the failure of plot summons up the unnarratability of the Iraq adventure, its unreason, and inevitably the idea that there was no reason to start with. Bigelow's version is a bit nature-of-man and, as such, largely apolitical. The film hasn't much of an analysis, as we are painfully aware from its punchline, a weak irony about life on the home front that a handful of Vietnam films conjured better a generation or two ago.

What it does have is pacing, an arena in which the director is incomparable. *The Hurt Locker* establishes a pitch of anxious suspension within a few seconds and basically holds it for more than hour; the conventions of tension and release that extend from Homer to Hogwarts are lost on Bigelow. She is so effective at generating the root ambivalence of cinematic violence, wherein we lust for the next luxuriously filmed detonation just as we flinch at the possibility, that there is no possibility of relief. That too is an argument about men and war, as much as about cinema.

Bigelow, not for the first time, had a camera designed just for the film. In *Strange Days*, something new was needed for a kinetic chase scene which upped the ante on POV sequences; one of the film's premises was a device, the "squid," that captures in full the wearer's experiences, for later playback. A special camera for a movie about special cameras. *The Hurt Locker* needed a superfast machine to capture in desired detail the explosion, the burst, the smoke, as if one could finally know the improvised explosive device not as a cinematic effect but an existential truth, toward which cinema is the royal road. Indeed, the film treats each bomb disposal as if it were a film set. Functionaries seal the area at each end, pacing with walkie-talkies while others provide lighting and logistics. Crew and locals ring the scene gawking or going about their business while the principals, the ones with the power to act, after great delay, play out their elaborately blocked scene. It is here, the movie suggests, on scene, on camera, in the theater of war, that experience is finally about nothing but itself, all its technicians and technologies leveraged to the awful, thrilling, and obliterating immediacy of war.

JOSHUA CLOVER is author of *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (University of California Press, 2009).

GOING OFFBEAT

***You, the Living* (Roy Andersson)**
***Lion's Den* (Pablo Trapero)**
***Eccentricities of a Blonde-Haired Girl* (Manoel de Oliveira)**

Since this round-up from New York usually consists of documentaries or near-documentaries, what on earth is Swedish filmmaker Roy Andersson's *You, the Living* doing here? To begin with, it is not a documentary and could never be mistaken for one. At the same time, however, it flouts the normal expectations of fictional filmmaking—such as continuity, consistency, coherence, and clarity. In doing so, the film creates a kind of paranormal documentary of its own—a visit to a world similar to ours but continually distorted in space, time, and plausibility. Andersson filmed nearly all of its scenes inside a studio, including a lengthy sequence in which a thunderstorm is sloshing heavy rain down all the windows. The prevailing visual tone is gray tinged with faint green and yellow, so that one isn't surprised to see a tram emerging from a dense fog with "Lethe" on its destination board.

The film opens with a quotation from Goethe's *Roman Elegies*: "Be pleased then, you the living, in your delightfully warm bed, before Lethe's ice-cold wave will lick your escaping foot." Andersson's approach is to toss in far more ice-cold waves than warm beds, but squeeze plenty of humor and surprise out of both.

Some members of the large cast appear in different roles, but although there are fragments of continuity (such as frequent scenes in a bar where it's always "last orders" time for the male and female regulars, or the multiple performances of a tuba player in a variety of situations) there is nothing resembling a conventional plot, except for an out-of-the-blue connection between the first scene and the last scene. Even seeing the film twice and making continual notes in the dark wasn't enough for me to master all of the intricacies.

The fifty-plus scenes nevertheless seem to follow one another as if they're building up to a rational sequence, even when they aren't. A driver caught in a traffic jam tells us about a nightmare he had in which (as is immediately shown) people are seated at a long table set for a fine dinner. The man prepares to demonstrate the trick of sharply pulling the tablecloth away so that everything else remains in place. (To no avail, someone asks: "Shouldn't we eat first?") The trick fails, of course, and since the smashed dishes were valuable heirlooms the perpetrator is taken to court, where the judge (drinking a ritual glass of beer) sentences him to death in the electric chair. The condemned man is brought in as the chair is still being tested. "Try to relax," says a guard. "Try to think of something else."

It's hard to think of anything else when Andersson is playing switcheroo with all the possibilities in his scenes.

A man in a room is practicing on a huge drum, timing it perfectly to a barely audible recording of the music. His wife (presumably) slams shut the door to the next room. He continues unfazed. Much later a man carrying a beautiful bouquet knocks at a door. A young woman opens it. He offers the bouquet. She slams the door so fast that the flowers are crushed in it . . . An Arab barber loses his temper with a snide client and runs his electric cutter from the man's nape to his forehead. He then says he'll fix the man's hair for free. Next scene: a small business meeting. The barber's client enters with a completely bald head. And soon the meeting is cut short by the sudden collapse and death of the chairman . . .

When *You, the Living* was shown at Cannes in 2007, some critics condemned it as too negative. Its effect, however, seems to me far more varied than that of Andersson's previous film, *Songs from the Second Floo*r, which could be described as a long crescendo of negativity, though often punctuated with humor.[†] By contrast, *You, the Living* has a sinuous plot in which a new event can seem to—or really does—have a connection with an earlier one. At the same time, the negative scenes are invariably brief or exaggerated to the point of humor. The sole exception is the final scene—for its implication, not for anything that actually happens.

It's tempting to go on and on, but let's be content with one of the longest, most charming, and most startling sequences in the film. It's a dream, and typically for Andersson we think we know what's happening because it's already been revealed as a dream. The young woman dreamer described it briefly at the closing-time bar: that she had met and married a popular electric guitar player called Micke Larsen. So in Andersson's world of distorted time and reality it's no great surprise to see them now in the film's later present. In their home the woman dresses up while Micke plays the guitar at a window. Suddenly we see via the window a passing view as if from a rapid train, and the passing view slows as the house (yes, the house) enters a station where a crowd is roaring con-

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An unlikely kindergarten
Lion's Den. Courtesy of Strand Releasing.

gratulations at the couple. Then our point of view shifts to the station platform, where we watch the couple waving goodbye to us as their home picks up speed and moves on.

That is Andersson the patient magician at work, turning a simple unreal dream into a wondrously impossible journey. (The sequence occupied two large studio areas and took two months of work to create.) But his dark side is equally impressive and has its own wonders.

⁂

Only after starting on this review did I recall having seen Pablo Trapero's first two films, *Crane World* and *El Bonaerense*, and having put them in the not-quite-enthusiastic categories of "well made" and "rather involving." *Lion's Den* has nothing uninvolving about it, including its main setting—a real women's prison with its real staff. Only the inmates are actors, and what they act has little if anything in common with the plots of prison exploitation films. (The film does, however, have an ambiguous ending, and you are warned that I describe it in the last three paragraphs.)

The prison has an even more unusual feature: inmates with very young children are allowed to keep them there.

Trapero both startles us and prepares us for that by opening the film with a bouncy cartoon of children skipping around and singing loudly. He then cuts to Julia, a well-to-do woman of about thirty, as she moves around the streets at night and then around her home in a state of agitation. Suddenly a paddy wagon, siren blaring, is delivering her to the women's prison. And because she is several months pregnant she's placed in the special section for women with children. (That system also exists to a greater or lesser extent in Canada, Spain, and several African countries. In many, though, as in the Buenos Aires prison of *Lion's Den*, the children are allowed to stay only until the age of four.)

Mothers and children share a large common area that includes the basics for looking after the infants and themselves, and around it are rooms with closable doors, each assigned to a different mother. That immediately cuts out most of the clichés of prison movies—tapping messages from cell to cell, trying to file window bars, improvising rope, and so on.

Julia is accused of murdering Nahual, a friend of her husband Ramiro, after she found them in bed together. At hearings within the prison she begs Ramiro to admit that he killed Nahual, but he insists he is innocent and the group of justices present decide in his favor. We never know the truth: we simply hear her heartrending cries each time Ramiro is led away from beyond the bars to freedom.

Meanwhile Julia has given birth to a boy she names Tomas and is settling into prison routine. After early clashes with some of her fellow prisoners she is now on good terms with them, especially since she has access to money that she's prepared to share with them for simple outside purchases. Meanwhile the inmates and staff keep looking much the same but Tomas is "aging"—being replaced by older infant actors.

Julia's mother Sofia, who lives in Paris, now appears on the scene. Since Tomas is approaching the age of four and Julia still has several more years to serve, Sofia wants to take

Tomas to live with her. Julia lashes out against the proposal but then seems to reconsider.

A transition period is arranged. Julia, Tomas, and Sofia are driven by a woman official to a house out in the country and apparently will spend time there for the boy to adjust to life outside prison bars.

At this point the film takes a sudden turn that could be real or imaginary. Julia pushes the woman official into a

Magic world

You, the Living. © 2007 Roy Andersson Film Produktion AB/Thermidor Filmproduktion, Parisienne de Production, Posthus Teatret, 4½, Stylejam, SVT, Arte France Cinéma, WDR. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

room with a self-locking door and runs with Tomas to the official's car. She drives off with him; next they are riding at night in a bus; and then it's daylight and they're walking along rough trails through thick grasses, with a few other people nearby. The camera stops moving as they walk on upward to what may be the edge of a lake. Julia and Tomas turn right and disappear from view.

If that ending is "real" (and then one has to wonder how Julia got hold of the car key and money) it could imply that she has no care for the future but simply wants as much time with her son as she can seize before being tracked down. (Or if there *is* a lake at the end, it could imply a double drowning.) On the other hand, if the ending presents not reality but Julia's wishful thinking it contains too many realistic details.

Of course, the puzzle of the ending is nothing compared to the puzzle implicit in the whole film. What is the best way of dealing with imprisoned women who have young children?

⁂

Probably the most inspired programming choice of the 2009 New York Film Festival was to pair the Maysles Brothers' 27-minute *Get Yer Ya-Yas Out* with centenarian Manoel de Oliveira's 64-minute *Eccentricities of a Blonde-Haired Girl*. The former consists of a crescendoing part of a performance by the Rolling Stones in New York City, 1969, followed by several minutes of them chatting and joking outdoors (free of crowds) while waiting for transportation. Their tour would lead to Altamont. The obvious contrasts between the two films in time, place, style, and ages make the former a brilliant prelude to the latter.

After a leisurely start as a filmmaker, Manoel de Oliveira shifted gears at age seventy-nine and since then has directed at least one film a year. *Eccentricities of a Blonde-Haired Girl* reveals no intention of its being his last. Indeed, though in some ways as peculiar as its title, it stands out for the subtle complexity behind its otherwise fairly transparent plot. It's based on a story with the same title—in Portuguese—by Eça de Queiros, Portugal's most respected nineteenth-century novelist.

In a sense the director plays a double game. The film begins on a train, apparently in the present. A conductor walks slowly away through a carriage, punching tickets from side to side. The scene is held long enough for us to note the contrast between the conductor's deliberate movements and the rushing sound of the train, as if we're in two different worlds.

Then we're focused on what appears to be a middle-aged couple in a double window seat. The man, however, suddenly says to her that what you can't tell to someone close to you can sometimes be told to a stranger. And she is willing to be that stranger.

The man's story begins in his second-floor apartment on a quiet street in Lisbon. Looking across from his window he sees a young woman at the window opposite, holding a colorful banjo-shaped Chinese fan. From now on he spends much time exchanging sweet glances with her. Meanwhile we learn that he works for his uncle, a trader who operates out of the floor below and provides his nephew with a salary and the apartment. It soon becomes clear that we're not in as modern a world as the train scene implied. Visits to a private artistic association with an elegant harpist and reciter of poetry suggest an older world focused on the rich and respectable. Since the relations between Macarios, the man on the train, and his sweetheart Vilaça have so far been restricted to smiles and glances between upstairs windows, we haven't even seen what kind of vehicles there are on the street below.

Macarios finally meets Vilaça and also her mother, who approves of him. He soon tells his uncle that he wants to marry. The uncle strongly objects (giving no reason) and says that if his nephew does so he will lose both his job and his apartment.

After futile attempts to find a job in Lisbon, Macarios is offered one at a trading post in Cape Verde, a group of Portuguese colonial islands off the western bulge of Africa—and returns a couple of years later (a few minutes in screen time) with considerable savings. His beloved is waiting for him, his uncle has changed his mind about marriage, and all is well—until our hero lends a large amount of money to an apparently needy friend, who absconds with it. So, reluctantly, he returns to Cape Verde for another stint. (Occasional cuts to the train remind us that there's more to come.)

Back in Lisbon and flush with money again, Macarios prepares for marriage with Vilaça. They go to a jeweler's and select a ring for her. As they are about to leave, the jeweler says there's another ring to pay for—one that Vilaça purloined. Our hero pays for it, they leave, and then he tells her to go away and never see him again.

The final comment comes from the train, seen from a bridge. It emerges below with a shrieking of its whistle and heads for the horizon—rather like a problem from the past pursuing someone into the future.

† By a stroke of luck, after having seen *You, the Living* twice at Film Forum, I discovered that the Museum of Modern Art was about to present a retrospective of Andersson's work. I was therefore able to catch up with *Songs from the Second Floor* and a documentary on the making of *You, the Living*.

WILLIAM JOHNSON is a former New York Editor of *Film Quarterly*.

THE H-MAN VS. *LIQUID HUMAN*

I

I remember seeing *The H-Man* on television one late evening in early adolescence; it was a silly specimen of an already cheesy 1950s genre, the "made in Japan" sci-fi/horror film. As usual, the hydrogen bomb served as *fons malorum*, but this time, it didn't produce giant monsters that terrified entire populations; it merely turned a few sailors into modestly scaled streaks of watery slime that went about melting people, one by one. It was as if the threat of atomic holocaust were being carried out by a small gang of serial killers. No self-respecting teenager, especially if he were also a young gentleman cinephile who considered the movie below his station, could resist pouring scorn on its feeble conceit—along with its trite characterizations, stilted dialogue, absurd science, and just *pitiful* special effects.

But a DVD explosion has caused *The H-Man* to mutate into a beautiful and genuinely harrowing new form: its original one as *Bijo to ekitainingen* (*Beauty and Liquid Human*, 1958).[†] The film now runs to its full length in proper Tohoscope proportion, has thrown off its black-and-white rags for regal technicolor (who knew?) and speaks fluent Japanese instead of cartoon English. In the metamorphosis, *Liquid Human* may have also become recognizable as one of classic cinema's great fantastic tales. But if I can't say so with certainty, that's because a curious mental deliquescence overcame me as I watched it; the film's conceit, to which I had once given a stony welcome, now affected me to excess. I found myself absorbed in the film, and yet unable to concentrate on it. It compelled me, but only to stand by and watch as it dissolved the normal organization of my attention. References commingled, categories blurred, and standards collapsed in confusion; among other casualties, the distinction between a frog and a prince had ceased to be watertight.

To begin with, I hardly knew what kind of film I was watching as *Liquid Human* slithered from one genre to another. This nominal sci-fi/horror successively absorbed the gangsters, girls, and detectives of a film noir; the deserted ship and melancholy blue specters of a ghost story; even the chanteuse and dance troupe of a musical. Perhaps the generic fluidity was part of what triggered my vivid, quasi-hallucinatory sense that other films were being streamed into my viewing, including some that lacked any serious or even sensible relation to *Liquid Human*. Amid the flux, I found myself seeing Ozu's *Early Autumn* for no better reason than that I recognized Yumi Shirakawa from that film as Chikako Arai, the chanteuse in this one. And in the eerie twang that composer Masaru Sato used to herald Liquid Human's approach, I heard his earlier score for *I Am Waiting*, a 1957 "Nikkatsu noir." With still more slickness, the ghosts in *Liquid Human* conjured up *Ugetsu* and *Throne of Blood*, while the sewers extended all the way back to *The Third Man* and Raymond Bernard's *Les Misérables*. At the beginning, when heavy showers drenched the Tokyo streets, the title number of *Singin' in the Rain* was also being performed; and next to the too-traumatized-to-be-heteronormative couple at the end, there were Mitch and Melanie from *The Birds*. These dubious collations presented themselves to me as peremptorily as sidebars spring up on a webpage. *Liquid Human* had my attention "running," without rule or propriety, all over the place.

Streaming associations

Top: *The H-Man*. © 1959 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. DVD: Columbia Pictures. Bottom: *The Birds*. © 1963 Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions, Inc/ renewed 1991 Universal Studios. DVD: Universal Studios.

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Liquefaction, turgidity, heat

The H-Man. © 1959 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. DVD: Columbia Pictures.

Such intertextual association, of course, lies latent in every viewing; an implicit sense of a film's resemblance-and-difference to others is a very condition of its intelligibility. Normally, though, a viewer keeps the process within bounds; having winnowed the deliberate from the fortuitous, and the meaningful from the irrelevant, he lets the chaff be still. What felt odd to me was not the capricious or contingent character of my associations, but my incapacity to keep them in their rightfully marginal place. And even less did I know what to do with the undeniable gratification I took in all this. After all, *Liquid Human* was granting me what my favorite art films were too special, too distinctively themselves, to have ever allowed: a deliriously glib vision of *virtual cinema*: an endless flux of images from all the films I had ever seen, or could imagine. Yet though I liked my new fluidity, I didn't like liking it. It had taken away my critical discrimination, and I regretted no longer being, as they used to say, a man of parts.

II

In the cruelty of youth, I deemed *The H-Man* as vacant of substance as those overcoats, suits, and uniforms that the H-Man, having dissolved a man's flesh, left lying behind. But youth can be cruel in many ways, and I also found the film, despite my best sarcastic intentions, intolerably sexy. What particularly inflamed my mind, and threatened to dissolve my too-solid flesh into a goo (incredible as this must sound to those unversed in the fanatically discreet ways that 1950s cinema ministered to sexual fantasy) was precisely those same overcoats, suits, and uniforms. For they are vacant because —or so the police at first suppose—the gangsters fleeing in them have "run away naked." Left lying first on the street—then on the stairs—then on the futon—they are thus placeholders for the male body imagined to have just slipped out of them: not only the dissolved body, invisible because it cannot be *seen*, but also the denuded body, invisible because it cannot be *shown*. The film soon takes this provocative doubleness into its very plot: the cleverest gangster, Uchida (the *beau-laid* Makoto Sato), throws his clothes into a heap and, while the police conclude he has been liquefied, waits tensely in the shadows, packing nothing but heat. As for the liquefaction process itself, Eiji Tsuburaya's special effects render it in yet more suggestive terms. He replaced the actors (for Liquid Human's victims are almost exclusively male) with balloons, giving the flesh an added turgidity and making its detumescence all the more spectacular as the air—along with the juice—pours out of them. This, in short, was what my adolescence had shamefully discerned in *The H-Man*: a homosexuality hidden in the respectability of suits and ties, and practiced under cover of a large mushroom cloud responsible for all sorts of abnormalities.

In *Beauty and Liquid Human*, the very title announces the dominant heterosexual orientation that I had overlooked,

but now find as obvious as I did the homosexual subtext. As one character tells us straight out, every man in the film—gangster, detective, or scientist, young or old, handsome or homely—is "after" the titular beauty, Chikako. And in the course of absorbing many of these admirers, Liquid Human comes to be after her too as its last, best prize. The coded homosexuality would be neutralized accordingly as a sort of male bonding, the gradual elimination and consolidation of rivals in preparation for a final attack on "the" woman. At the film's climax, Uchida drags Chikako down into the sewers, where he offers her an ostensibly stark choice: be his girl, or be dissolved by Liquid Human. But it's the same difference: mauling this beauty and melting her seem equivalent sexual aims. They also appear to be the *only* ones where she is concerned. Though Dr. Masada (Kenji Sahara) wins Chikako by protecting her from both outcomes, this boyish hero hardly counts as a mature male. Even as it is, he must be wounded on his chivalric quest, his blood let on the same principle by which leeches were formerly applied to cool down the febrile body, or calm down the overexcited one; unsurprisingly, his first act on rescuing Chikako is to put more clothes on her.

III

All this is the very stuff of mainstream representation, but something has polluted the stream. Much of what I missed the first time around was in fact *missing*: the American version had been censored. Columbia Pictures, the U.S. distributor, didn't simply change the film's title, so as to eliminate its luridly mythic opposition between female beauty and a bestial human liquid; it also edited out some of its most intense images, which only now, fifty years later, we can see.

The main object of this censorship was, curiously, the liquefaction of Liquid Human's only female victim: Emi (Ayumi Sonoda), the "cheap" Chikako-proxy who is the club's lead dancer. Two shots were eliminated. Like the male victims, Emi leaves her clothes behind, but what remains on the floor in her case is not a boxy suit or coat, but the sequined bra-and-panty costume she performs in. The deletion of this image perhaps requires little explanation; given the targeted audience of normal American boys, it was doubtless considered too precise an evocation of female nudity. The more puzzling case is the shot of Emi's actual liquefaction that was removed as well. For this, Tsuburaya created a unique special effect. The outline of Emi's body, instead of collapsing, remains intact, as a freeze frame insists we notice. At the same time, through the introduction of animation into this frame, the flesh is shown being gradually replaced, from the bottom up, with a bubbling green liquid. This may indeed be the sexiest moment in the film, but it is certainly the weirdest as well; what its sexiness consists in is by no means easily assimilable to conventional paradigms. And though 1950s Japanese horror films suffered a variety of indignities before they were released in the U.S. (such as, famously, the replacement of the Japanese reporter with a white American in the 1954 *Godzilla*), the removal of a gruesome special effect was not among them; such horrors sold the movie.

The shot, then, needs to be looked at more closely (chapter 18). Right before it, we have seen the greenish Liquid Human puddling at the feet of Emi's lover (himself just liquefied), then surging up her legs. Perhaps, with this implicit heterosexual allegory in mind, the Columbia censors saw the subsequent special effect as spelling it out; they saw, in other words, Emi's body being filled up, like a glass, with the Liquid Human that was pouring out of her lover. But that is not in fact what we see here. Emi's body is not filled up, but *covered over*. In this sense, it is all the odder that the shot was censored because the covering-over is already censorship of a classic kind; we see much less of Emi's body than before, and the uniform green ooze blots out the erogenous markers central to heterosexually organized excitement. The trouble with Emi's empty costume was merely the overexplicitnesss of thus "undressing" her; the more serious trouble with Emi's liquefaction is the indefinition that results from a certain way—neither modest nor "provocative"—of *dressing* her.

We should not dismiss this image as a technically primitive special effect that Tsuburaya, with today's CGI, would have corrected so that Liquid Human came unmistakably *in* Emi and not *on* her. The disturbing—and disturbingly sexy—quality of the image lies precisely in the fact that neither the attack nor its object is *heterosexual enough*. The green caress does not penetrate Emi's body, which in turn becomes nothing more than an effervescent surface. Her new skin—but can we call it "hers," or even "his"?—does not recognize genitalia, erogenous zones, or even different body parts. The costume's sequins seem to be sparkling everywhere on this skin, whose only variegation is provided by the shifting patterns and intensities of its ebullience. In this garish but gripping light, the bra and panties left behind seem the useless castoffs of a libido that has ceased to recognize them as the metonyms of its sole theater of operations. Emi's liquefaction might be thought of as visualizing what Gilles Deleuze calls "the body without organs": a body released from the grip of sex organs and orientations, and transformed into a field of radical perversity whose multiple excitements can be entertained anywhere, anyhow.

Here, of course, Deleuze's utopia of sexual disintegration wears the aspect of horror—the feel is sexy but does anyone want to look like this? Yet in a horror film, the horror can

Emi's two outfits

The H-Man. © 1959 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. DVD: Columbia Pictures.

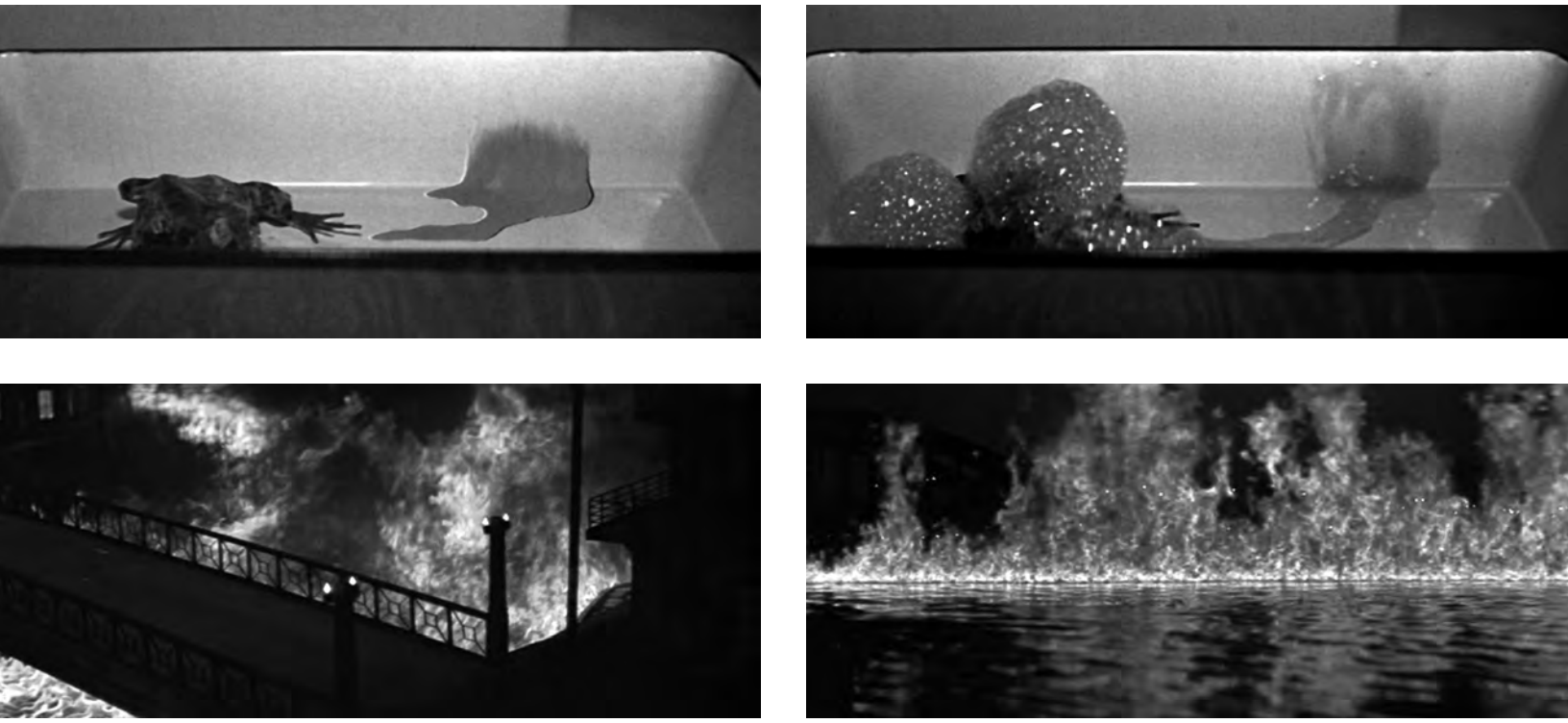
never be just horrible; its repellence is the royal road to our absorption in it. Thus, though we are grateful to see the cutaway shot of Chikako in a strapless gown putting on lipstick—a quick reaffirmation of the classically partitioned heterosexual object—we are more grateful to see Liquid Human again, now of ambiguated gender, as it slides up the powder-room wall to threaten her with Emi's fate.

This continual wavering between classic sex and libidinal virtuality finds its objective correlative in Liquid Human itself. Though the creature typically appears as a sort of slime torpedo, it also takes two other forms that isolate its polarities. On the one hand, it appears as, simply, *human*. Those doleful blue specters, featureless of face, but definitely anthropomorphic in body, whom we see on board the abandoned ship are elegiac reminders of the mutant when it was still imaginable as having an ennobling human quality. On the other hand, it also appears as, simply, *liquid*. The slime torpedo not only finds its natural habitat in water, but also requires sea, sewer, river, and rainstorms to get about in the world. It thus turns every watery substance into a potential extension of its being. (Even "liquid refreshments" such as the vaguely sinister cocktails consumed at the club seem possible carriers; Uchida's clothes are found in a subterranean liquor storeroom, and the ship captain has disappeared in the midst of drinking a glass of whiskey that remains suggestively half-full on his table.) Such "mere" liquid no longer has any connection with the human at all; no ghost from the human past, it is the wave—upon wave upon wave—of an unhuman future.

The point is most forcefully made when, to demonstrate the origin of Liquid Human, Dr. Masada bombards a frog with radiation; the resultant froggy liquid is then put into a dish with a still-normal fellow amphibian, which melts on contact. But the liquid per se, familiarly green and bubbling, no more allows us to tell Liquid Frog from Liquid Human than the film lets us distinguish genre cinema from art-film intelligence. Ultimately, the film's monster of dissolution, not even species-specific, is perhaps better named just Liquid. As such, it stands in total opposition to the eponymous Blob in the American film also from 1958. The Blob, the poor man's Sartrian nightmare, mires its victims in the viscosity of things; Liquid, Deleuze's wet dream, does not murder, but melts; here human dignity is lost to going—or is it coming?—with the flow.

IV

In the end, Liquid is a problem requiring resolution. "The only way we can fight it," says the Scientist in charge of the operation, "is with fire," water's symbolically antithetical substance. Appropriately, gasoline is released into the sewers and set ablaze. As the spreading conflagration gives Tokyo's waterways a blistering new skin, its efficacy at first seems straightforward; we see the slimy form of Liquid being seared, and the humanoid form being shrunken. Yet, as we eventually



Froggy liquid, puritan fire

The H-Man. © 1959 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. DVD: Columbia Pictures.

realize, we do *not* see the virtual form (as "the watery") misting away. (And if this did happen, we would only have got a sneak preview of *The Human Vapor*, the horror movie that Ishiro Honda, as if cycling mutancy through the four elements, made a year later.) The Scientist pronounces Liquid "as good as dead," but it looks more like Liquid has mutated into a river of fire that—as fire—will never be extinguished and that —as river—will never dry up.

With flames leaping over bridges and tall buildings, Liquid finally acquires the dimensions suitable to the Monstrous; and as these flames take possession of the entire visual field, it also finally offers a worthy image of the atomic holocaust that, in slime form, constrained to proceed by one body at a time, it had signally failed to represent. To clinch the point, Sato's juicy jazz track lapses into the shrill military march already heard during the H-bomb explosion that begins the film. We are being summoned back to attention. And attention must now again be paid as, over the final image of flames, the Scientist solemnly warns us of the possible extinction of humanity by the H-bomb.

Strangely, though, his warning feels too late, coming amid apocalyptic imagery that doesn't allow us to distinguish between atomic annihilation and anti-radioactive weaponry, or between a spectacle of Liquid Triumphant and a scene of Liquid Being Brought to Order. The conflation is the Liquid effect intended to end all Liquid effects. For if it does not succeed in eliminating Liquid from Earth, it does manage to eliminate the libidinal from Liquid. In youth, I protected myself from the film's over-palpable excitements with sarcasm; censors had already done something similar through excision; but such expedients are pale fire compared to the far more drastic option now taken by the film itself. This is the "nuclear option" of fusing Liquid to a single all-embracing devastation that would annul libido in *every* form. To render Liquid even figuratively ("as good as") dead, overkill is literally the order of the day; as the Scientist insists, "*Any* suspicious areas must be burned." In this Hiroshima of Sex, libidinal mobility is tolerable only as the permanent mobilization against it.

† The new DVD gives us the choice of watching either the English-language version of *The H-Man* or the Japanese original. With a strange contempt, though, Sony has retained the export title for the DVD menu of both versions, and has not even subtitled the Japanese title when it appears on screen in the original version. Here I've chosen to use its literal translation, in the shortened form of *Liquid Human*. To Anglophone viewers, the "H" in *The H-Man* is no doubt quite expressive (of the Homo, the He-man, the Human, and the H-bomb, not to mention Horror and Hell); but *Liquid Human*, in suspending the antitheses between definite/indefinite, singular/plural, and male/female, names something more fundamental to the film.

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DVD DATA *Icons of Sci-Fi: The Toho Collection* [*The H-Man, Battle in Outer Space, Mothra*]. Director: Ishiro Honda. Publisher: Columbia Pictures. © 1959, 1960, 1961, renewed 1987, 1988, 1989 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. $24.96, 3 discs.

DEBATING *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS*

"It's a little early in the morning for explosions and war," Butch (Bruce Willis) tells his girlfriend Fabienne (Maria de Medeiros) in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. He might be right; it depends on your idea of fun. The movie she's watching on their motel-room television is *The Losers*, a 1970 exploitationer in which Hell's Angels take on the Viet Cong. It's the kind of exercise in two-fisted genre-hopping that influenced Tarantino's latest picture, *Inglourious Basterds*, which brings Spaghetti Western tropes to bear on its World War II mission-movie template. But Tarantino also shows Butch, as a child, watching *Clutch Cargo*, a semi-animated TV show from 1959 that melds animated and live-action elements to unconvincing yet disquieting effect. With its queasy collision of the cartoonish and the real, it has as much in common with *Inglourious Basterds* as the movie featuring explosions and war.

Even before its Cannes premiere, *Inglourious Basterds* attracted controversy for its rewriting of history, its blending of fantasy and fact. Set between 1941 and 1944, its five chapters follow two separate plots to assassinate senior Nazi figures, including Hitler, in a Paris cinema. One is orchestrated by Shosanna Dreyfus (Mélanie Laurent), sole survivor of a French Jewish family murdered in the opening chapter ("Once Upon a Time . . . In Nazi-Occupied France") by SS troops led by Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz); in the third chapter, "German Night in Paris," we see Shosanna living under an alias and meeting German war hero Frederick Zoller (Daniel Bruehl), a famous sniper. In the other plot, outlined in the fourth chapter ("Operation Kino"), British Intelligence sends Lieutenant Archie Hicox (Michael Fassbender) to liaise with the titular Basterds, a group of Jewish American soldiers, introduced in the eponymous second chapter, led by Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) and dedicated to the terrorizing and killing of Nazis. This plot also involves German movie star and British secret agent Bridget von Hammersmark (Diane Kruger). The final chapter, "The Revenge of the Giant Face," brings success: Hitler, Goebbels, Goerring, and Bormann are killed and the war ended.

Such cavalier revisionism, coupled with the Basterds' gruesome violence, has provoked outrage among some critics. On his blog, Jonathan Rosenbaum called the film "deeply offensive as well as profoundly stupid . . . morally akin to Holocaust denial." Others thought it formally rather than morally problematic, fragmented, talky, and ill-paced: in his one-star *Guardian* review, Peter Bradshaw wrote it off as "a colossal, complacent, long-winded dud, a gigantic two-and-a-half-hour anti-climax." Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* thought it "unwieldy," "interminable," "repellent," and "vulgar." Others, though, relished the movie's self-consciously cinephile brio, including *Rolling Stone*'s Peter Travers ("multi-lingual pulp poetry") and Roger Ebert, who hailed Tarantino in the *Chicago Sun-Times* as "the real thing, a director of quixotic delights." Still others were uneasily ambivalent. In the *The New Yorker*, David Denby thought the picture "too silly to enjoy" but suggested that "whether the Basterds are Tarantino's ideal of an all-American killing team or his parody of one is hard to say." Michael Wood expressed similarly skeptical uncertainty in the *London Review of Books*: "What's impossible to know is how Tarantino himself views this story. Irony is not his thing, but stupidity isn't either."

Ambivalent seems about right. Just what is Tarantino getting at? The sadistic bloodlust of his Jewish avengers is as unsettling as his revisionist chutzpah is disarming. But when Dargis alleges that "Tarantino is really only serious about his own films, not history," she is only half-right. It might be true that, without much thought for the reality of war, he saw here an opportunity to map his pet plot of female revenge onto an interesting genre. But Tarantino is serious about other people's films, too, and the medium's power. Formally and narratively, *Inglourious Basterds* is drenched in cinema to a degree remarkable even for a director defined by his movie love. In a *Newsweek* feature morally critical of the film, Daniel Mendelsohn aptly noted that if the film "represents an evolution for the director, it's that in this new movie, the movies aren't just a subtle (or not so subtle) element in an allusive aesthetic game; they are, at last, front and center."

All Tarantino features offer characters comparing one another to Lee Marvin or Christie Love, splitting hairs about or giving subtextual readings of their favorite movies (as well as songs, comic books, and TV shows). They bulge with stylistic quotations from other pictures, boast in-joke casting, and increasingly draw attention to their own status as cinematic artefacts. The blatantly conspicuous process shots deployed in *Pulp Fiction* and 1970s-style credit sequence of *Jackie Brown* metastasized into the wholesale genre-raiding of

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War and fun

Inglourious Basterds. Photo: François Duhamel/TWC 2009. Courtesy of The Weinstein Company.

the *Kill Bill* films, and the metatextual larks of the *Grindhouse* collaboration with Robert Rodriguez, whose pseudo-retro exploitation fare came furnished with scratches, distortions, and trailers for nonexistent schlock. *Inglourious Basterds* retains elements of this: it opens, for instance, with a Universal Studios logo whose vintage hints at neither the film's setting nor its production date, but the period midway between, the tone of whose genre pictures it apes. The score is filched from other films, characters are named for obscure actors and filmmakers, and there are innumerable references to UFA, G. W. Pabst, and Leni Riefenstahl; there's even a riff on *King Kong* as representative of "the story of the negro in America." Some critics applauded such cineliteracy as its own reward. *Salon*'s Stephanie Zacharek, suggested that "in a film culture informed largely by mindlessly enthusiastic fanboys . . . maybe we need Tarantino and other filmmakers who, like him, have some knowledge of the past."

Yet cinema provides not only incidental references: it is also the meat of the plot. The heroines of *Death Proof* (Tarantino's half of the *Grindhouse* double bill) were stuntwomen by profession; here, nearly everyone works in movies. Operation Kino relies on Hammersmark, a star, and Hicox, a critic. The Basterds pose as Italian filmmakers. Shosanna runs a cinema ("we respect directors in our country," she insists) where she plans to interrupt the premiere of *Nation's Pride*, starring self-described film fan Zoller as himself, with her own film, a prologue to the Nazi audience's death in an inferno caused by flammable nitrate film. Goebbels is referred to as "the leader of the entire German film industry," and compared to Mayer and Selznick. Even Hitler, introduced posing for a portrait, seems more star than politician. "I like that it's the power of the cinema that fights the Nazis," Tarantino has said. "But not just as a metaphor, as a literal reality." To some, this film-saturated world is not a denial of reality but a hymn of praise. "It's not an ego trip," according to *Rolling Stone*'s Travers. "Tarantino's power punch comes from cinema itself . . . for anyone professing true movie love, there's no resisting it."

Movie as WMD, destroying the Third Reich, ending the war—an alluring idea, indeed, but a flagrantly fantastical one. You can almost hear Tarantino snigger up his sleeve when he has a character ask: "What shall the history books read?" But not even those outraged by Tarantino's revisionism should be surprised by it. He has already hinted that he finds nothing sacred by rewriting scripture itself: the version of Ezekiel 25.17 so vigorously quoted in *Pulp Fiction* is not in any Bible. In that film, Vincent (John Travolta) suggests

to Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) that miracles happen "when God makes the impossible possible," and Tarantino relishes the storyteller's comparable ability: Vincent, like Melanie (Bridget Fonda) in *Jackie Brown*, dies, but is resurrected by choppy chronology. Given these seigneurial precedents for reworking gospel and undoing death, it's no great leap to rewrite history to hasten a downfall. The question is whether Hitler is fair game, or whether to monkey with the facts of World War II is to cross a moral line. Dargis thinks so, as does Mendelsohn, who reminded readers that "these bad guys were real, this history was real, and the feelings we have about them and what they did are real." Any license taken with the facts, then, jeopardizes the mantra "never again." But is irreverence the same as indifference?

Today, few subjects are as culturally hallowed as World War II, enshrined in popular culture as the locus of the greatest sacrifice, the greatest heroism, the greatest evil, and the greatest tragedy. At the time, things were different, as Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not To Be* demonstrates. In particular, Hitler was considered fair game for satire. In his *Sight and Sound* review of *Inglourious Basterds*, Kim Newman regarded Tarantino's ending as "a torture porn take on the celebrated British screen wish-fulfilment moment when George Formby thumped Der Führer in *Let George Do It* (1940)." Other moments of irreverence include the *Captain America* comic-book cover in which the hero biffs Hitler, Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, and the genitally fixated lyrics set to the "Colonel Bogey March." After the war, with the danger passed and the extent of Nazi atrocities evident, lampoon was less useful, and by 1968, *The Producers* could prompt arguments about bad taste. But genre escapades and Nazis stock villains continued to appear afterwards: from 1970s thrillers, *Marathon Man* and *The Boys from Brazil*, to the Gestapo farce of the 1980s BBC sitcom, *'Allo 'Allo!*. Only since the 1990s, when the generation who experienced the war ceded political and cultural dominance to their children, have piety and sentimentality become the dominant cultural registers.

The challenge of *Inglourious Basterds*, then, lies in its assertion that war films—and indeed war—can be fun. As well as framing the movies as a mode of combat, it presents combat as a variety of entertainment, for both participants and viewers. The Basterds are war criminals, explicitly denying Nazis' humanity, targeting them for summary execution, and desecrating their corpses by scalping. They are, as J. Hoberman put it in the *Village Voice*, "a cross between the Dirty Dozen and a Nazi death squad," and they love their work enough for Rosenbaum to call the film a "gleeful celebration of savagery." It is even suggested that to collaborate in such barbarity is equivalent to watching its depiction. "Quite frankly," Raine tells one victim early on, "watching Donnie beat Nazis to death is the closest we ever get to going to the movies." But for sheer delight, even the Basterds can't top Hans Landa. Universally acknowledged as the film's stand-out character, he has an alluring, alarming mix of brilliance, cruelty, and strangely childlike glee. Forever clapping with joy or collapsing in hysterics, he is, as Hoberman writes, "not only the movie's villain, but also its master of revels . . . Eichmann as fun guy!" In fact, the amount of fun he has is downright unnerving.

And it's no great leap from fun to funny. Tarantino has often used extreme violence for comic effect: every *Pulp Fiction* audience surely laughs at the line, "Oh, man, I shot Marvin in the face!" But what about torture as entertainment? *Reservoir Dogs* was initially denied U.K. certification because of the scene in which Mr. Blonde (Michael Madsen) sets about a captive cop with a razor, a can of gas, and recreational relish; yet we were encouraged to sympathize with the horrified onlooker who shoots Blonde dead. By *Pulp Fiction*, things get muddier: when Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) declares to his rapist his intention to "get medieval on your ass" with a blowtorch and a pair of pliers, Wallace's status as victim lends an air of righteous triumphalism to the move. In the *Kill Bill* films and *Death Proof*, homicidal vengeance *is* heroism, and deliberate infliction of pain part of the package. It's unclear whether Raine's use of torture on von Hammersmark—he aggravates a bullet wound when suspicious that she might be a traitor—is meant to put his heroic status in doubt; in practice, probably not. The character can seem like George W. Bush as played, indulgently, by Clark Gable. Both times I saw *Inglourious Basterds*, the audience laughed along with the violence, which is consistently framed as comedy, from baseball-bat attack and torture scenes to shootings and scalpings.

But it remains ambiguous whether such tactics are, as Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn suppose, meant to be approved rather than indulged. The film explicitly invites us to take a break from historical reality, and presents itself under an obviously incorrect title (a co-option of Raine's misspelling: the carved lettering that adorns his rifle butt is also used as the movie's title card). Perhaps it is also offering a kind of ethical holiday—a vicarious immorality that it knows is wrong, but might be fun to try on, just for kicks. For all the film's troubling ambiguity, there are hints that Tarantino is not blind to the parallels between the Basterds and their targets: in *Nation's Pride*, Zoller carves a swastika into a floor as Raine does to German foreheads, including in the movie's final shot. Many critics have seen the American's accompanying line—"I think this just might be my masterpiece"—as chest-puffing on Tarantino's part, but, if it is, he is placing himself, and Raine, in dubious company: it echoes an earlier line, in which Zoller says of *Nation's Pride* that "Josef [Goebbels] thinks this film will prove to be his masterpiece."

Inglourious Basterds, then, is less interested in the ethics of war, let alone the substance of history, than in the power of cinema, its ability to lure us into moral quicksand or hold us in suspense. Interestingly, even as he apes certain aspects of genre, Tarantino neglects other conventional pleasures. Todd McCarthy noted in *Variety*, with that publication's eye on the bottom line, that "the preponderance of subtitled dialogue might put off a certain slice of the prospective domestic audience." And, whether intentionally or not, the multilingual, dialogue-heavy longueurs that precede each chapter's concluding ecstasy of violence map onto Landa's taking his time with his victims, stringing out the small talk, having another glass of milk, not eating the strudel before the cream arrives (another—deliberate?—mistake, at least for Viennese culinary purists). Calling the film "unforgivably leisurely, almost glacial," Kenneth Turan in the *Los Angeles Times* also intimated that "that lack of vigor almost seems to be what the writer-director is after." Tarantino's motto here could be: "Wait for the cream!"

When it comes, the story's climax is as blunt an assertion of the phantasmagorical power of cinema as the medium has ever delivered. Shosanna and Zoller kill each other but are resurrected as filmic images—themselves agents of death—before flames consume the screen and then the audience. What remains is a weird form of film as fatal dominatrix, a close-up of Shosanna projected onto smoke —the giant face of the chapter's title—laughing as her viewers burn. It is at once absurd and overwhelming, hollow and irresistible, like that other giant face in *The Wizard of Oz*; like any big-screen close-up. Perhaps this is why so much time is spent carving swastikas into foreheads, removing scalps, pumping bullets into Hiter's face. In this hypercinematic world, what could be worse than being rendered unfit for a close-up?

Inglourious Basterds both salutes and problematizes the power of film, appreciating that bad guys as well as good can adore and exploit this potency, and recognizing that to be a spectator is not without moral consequence: only a thoughtless viewer will not see him or herself reflected in shots of Hitler cackling as he watches Americans being slaughtered in *Nation's Pride*. Yet it also suggests that what one will do and what one will watch need not coincide. While the Nazi audience laps up his on-screen slaughter, Zoller excuses himself from the theater. "I don't like watching this part," he says. Perhaps he felt it was a little late in the day for explosions and war. Like so many things, it depends on your idea of fun.

BEN WALTERS is the author of *The Office* (BFI TV Classics, 2005).

KINO

1/2-PAGE AD

WHY DO SOME IMAGES BEGIN TO TREMBLE? CINEMA REVISITS MILITANT POLITICS

NINA POWER REVIEWS *A GRIN WITHOUT A CAT, THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX,* AND *TERROR'S ADVOCATE*

How best to capture the spirit of a more radical age? An age not yet fully comprehended and yet already disappearing into the ether, even (or especially) under the weight of relentless commemorations. The radical politics of the 1960s and 70s are the subject of three recent releases: a reissue (Chris Marker's *A Grin Without a Cat*, originally released in France in 1978), a documentary (Barbet Schroeder's 2007 film about Jacques Vergès, *Terror's Advocate*), and a 2008 narrative feature (Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex*). All three wrestle with one major idea above all: can cinema do justice to recent history? Particularly, and this is most of all the case for *A Grin Without a Cat*, if that history is the history of defeat. On the formal level, there is the question of how to represent politics cinematically. *The Baader Meinhof Complex* operates, rather knowingly, at the level of the violence and libidinal pull of the terrorists themselves. Schroeder instead quietly attempts to pull judgment away from his subject, leaving the viewer to reflect upon the enigma of Vergès' mixture of fearless justice-seeking and gleeful perversity. Marker's operation is the most complex of all, selecting and masterfully ordering precisely that which cannot be finalized; editing, one might be tempted to say, at the level of the dialectic itself.

UNSTABLE HANDS AND VOICES

First released in France in 1978, updated for re-release in 1993, and finally reissued in the U.S. in 2009, *A Grin Without a Cat* defies easy description: a documentary with multiple narrators; found footage cut with fictional political films, unlikely interviews, and allusive voiceovers; newsreel footage filtered through a series of eerie reds, yellows, and blues, and overlaid with an other-worldly electronic soundtrack by Luciano Berio. It is the editing which astonishes above all. The opening sequence gives an indication of the director's cool hand: scenes from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) are expertly juxtaposed with violent images of protests: a bloodied body is carried down steps that could be those of Odessa themselves, the real trauma in Marker's footage counterpointing Eistenstein's memorable but fictional vision (no massacre ever took place at the real Odessa steps, but the violence in Marker's film is no illusion).

Although *A Grin Without a Cat* is recognizably a Marker film, complete with occasional invocations of Marker's most famous signature animal, and not just in the title ("the cat is never on the side of power," notes one narrator), the film's authorship is disavowed in a statement at the end of the film: "The real authors of this film (even though most of them were not consulted about the use of their documents) are the innumerable cameramen, sound engineers, witnesses and militants, working against the powers that be, who would prefer us to have no memory." It is historical memory, and the memory inscribed in images, however unsteady, that Marker seeks to preserve. The title itself, *A Grin Without a Cat*, the whisper of a memory left by Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat, is Marker's English approximation of the original French title, *Le Fond de l'air est rouge*, literally "the base of the air is red," or, better, "at bottom the air is red." Both the original French and the English title capture the fleeting yet curiously persistent nature of the political struggle of this period, but the two versions are not quite the same film. *A Grin Without a Cat*, reworked in 1993 and shown on Channel 4 in Britain in 1994, is fifty minutes shorter than the French version and has a new commentary at the end, with Marker reflecting on the historical shifts between the 1960s and the 90s. The film, which, apart from the additional later addendum, covers the time period 1967–73, is broken into two roughly equal-length parts: "Fragile Hands" and "Severed Hands." The image of fragile hands, taken from a French student banner ("workers will take the flag of struggle from the fragile hands of the students"), is ultimately a reflection of the ambiguous role of the cameraman documenting political protest, and his or her uneasy complicity with the spectacle. "Why do some images

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begin to tremble?" The film asks this question over shaky footage from the Prague Spring, reflecting the nervousness and excitement of the cameraman falsely convinced he can keep himself steady in the face of social upheaval.

It is not only images that tremble, of course, but words too. Marker manages to locate footage in which strange truths half-emerge from behind the patina of correct lines. One worker speaks of the good old days of unemployment before quickly replacing "good" with "bad"; another starts to defend Stalin before hastily swapping "Sta—" for "Lenin." The speed and ideological reversals from one month to the next are unconsciously revealed in the unstable hands and voices of those thrown into struggles that seemed impossible only weeks before, where words stop belonging to individuals and instead start to belong to history itself. But the cameraman or woman, let alone the historian, has no special powers here, no capacity to discern what might happen. Marker's response to the inventiveness of history is to ironically note those doomed attempts to capture it. One voice wryly notes at the beginning of 1967, "the best minds deemed that at long last we had reached maturity," while footage shows an elderly couple on a game show being presented with a television to which they delightedly respond "we're a two-set family now." In a 2008 essay entitled "Sixties" that accompanies the new DVD, Marker notes that in 1967, "to discern the waves of the seism that began to shatter our planet you really didn't have to be prophetic. All you needed was to move, and keep your eyes open." As one voice in the film puts it: "you can never tell what you might be filming." Marker, as editor, is of course on the other side of this unpredictability, but he remains true to the speed and shakiness of the material he uses.

FILMING HISTORY

While Marker's film is an undeniably beautiful and moving piece of assemblage and scripting, it is also a profoundly important historical document (or rather, given the variety of

Montage with a cool hand

A Grin Without a Cat. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. DVD: Icarus Films.

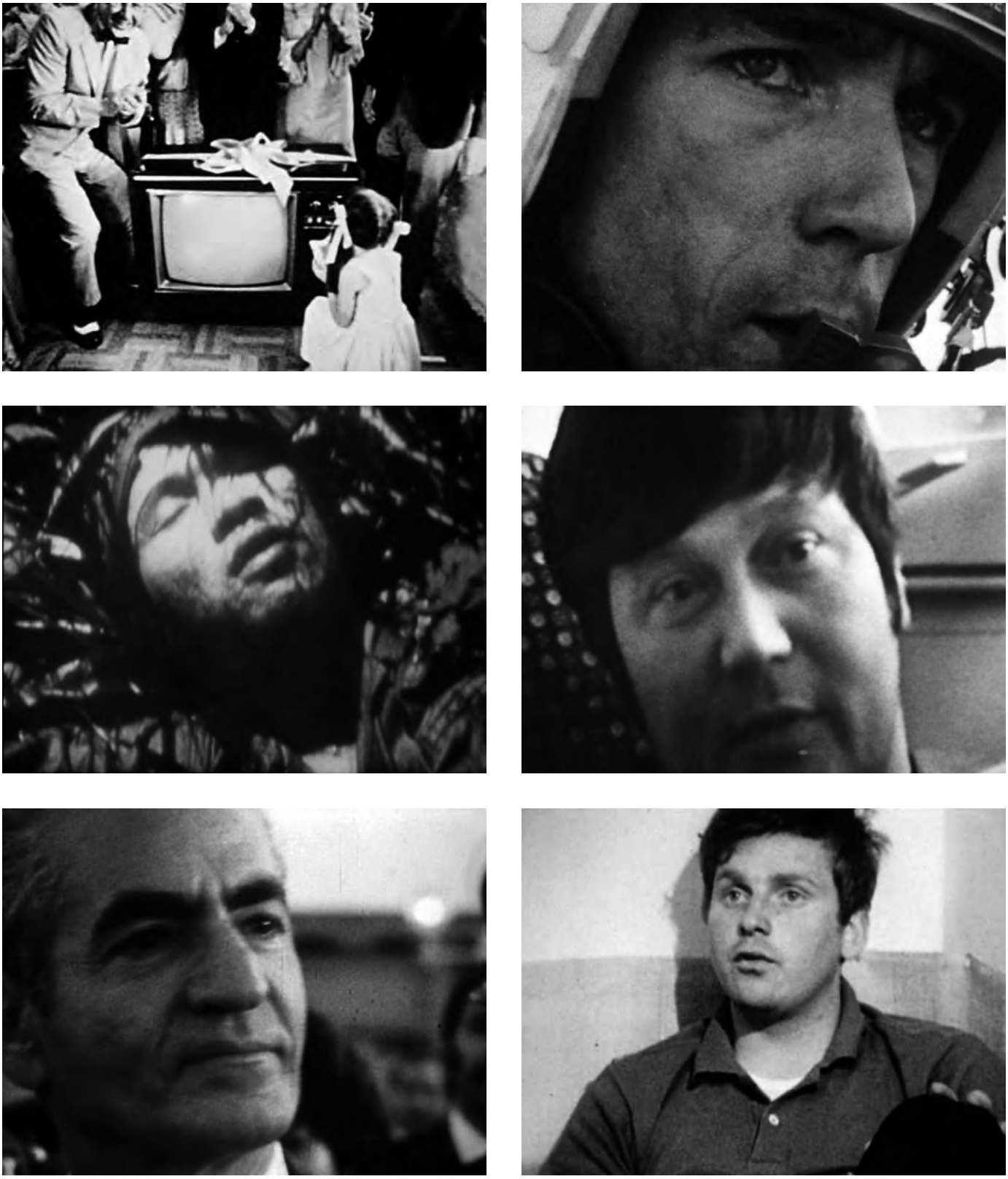
materials, *series* of documents). Unlike the recent round of commemorations for the fortieth anniversary of May '68 in which establishment figures reminisced about the heady atmosphere of liberation, *A Grin Without a Cat* notes the relative lateness and derivate nature of the May events among the major international protests and insurgencies of this period. Indeed, 1967 is the pivotal year here, and this is where the film begins. "One word: Vietnam," says a voice, reminding us that the protests of the late 1960s, for all their home-grown anger and social demands, had their roots in a serious global uprising against the carnage waged by America's brutal war in Southeast Asia. We see an American pilot dropping napalm and crowing—"look at it burn, look at it burn!"—as delegates at arms fairs are shown the latest in PSYOPS technology and protestors take to the streets in their thousands. The increasing reality of America's defeat in Vietnam, coupled with the viciousness of the police in the Berlin protests against the visit of the Shah of Iran in 1967 (where Edel's Baader-Meinhof film begins) and across American campuses (culminating in the shootings of four students at Kent State University in 1970) place the more celebrated protests of May–June 1968 in bloody context.

Images may tremble, but history can sometimes perform acrobatics, dazzling observers with its impossible moves and unforeseen twists. But there will never be a shortage of analysis, both from the middle of struggle and from the outside looking in. Marker parades before us in rapid succession key figures from the period: Rudi Dutschke, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Régis Debray in Bolivia, Douglas Bravo in Venezuela, the death of Guevara in Bolivia, a Black Panther rally in San Francisco with dozens of hands clutching little red books. Students, militants, workers, and union leaders appear alongside these more recognizable faces in more or less successful attempts to keep up with the present. The police represented one kind of order, notes Marker, the union stewards another, and between them a space had to be filled. It is in this space, the literal space filled by the protestors of 1967 and 1968, that the New Left was born. In the "Sixties" essay Marker assesses the emergence of this historical movement, as diverse as it was, with unusual directness: *A Grin Without a Cat* "revolves around a precise theme: what happens when a party, the CP, and a great power, the USSR, cease to embody the revolutionary hope, what looms up in their place and how the showdown is staged."

A Grin Without a Cat is this and much more, however, and Marker is blunt (if typically self-deprecating) in his further claim from the same essay that "having gleaned a few traces of these luminous and murky years, I tinkered with these films [the films from the same period as *A Grin Without a Cat*, including *Far From Vietnam* (1967) with Jean-Luc Godard and others]. They don't claim to be any more than that: traces." Certainly there are "traces" and memories of events, people, and situations that deserve never to be forgotten—we are reminded of, among other things, the killing of hundreds of protestors shortly before the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, the self-immolation of students in Prague protesting against the Soviet invasion, the courage, gentleness, and wit of Salvador Allende. The minute observations, too, are perfect: Castro's habit of adjusting the angle of microphones during speeches, a tic much loved by his supporters, comes unstuck in Moscow where the microphones are fixed in position. The devil of history lies in the details.

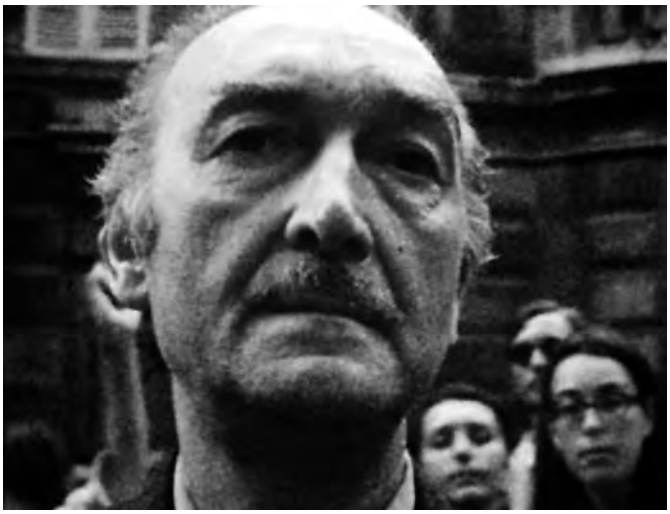
Although Marker claims in the essay that the film is "in no way the chronicle of a decade," it is really far more than that, shadowing the losses and melancholia of the late 1960s and 70s by remaining true to the anti-authoritarian impulse at the heart of the protests (Marker is most critical in this regard of the Maoists, both in China and France, in hock to their own need to believe and practicing a dangerous "upside-down dialectic"). But the film as a whole strikes a much darker and much more long-term historical tone: at one point a voice notes that amid all the heavily documented and fervently discussed street battles and enthusiasms, "perhaps what people observed less at the time was the emergence of the new right." It is this New Right that is also invoked in one striking 1968 interview with a PR officer for a French company. Management, he says, will increasingly become a matter for specialist technicians, for technocrats and not for union leaders. Radical ideas of "co-management" would be easily subsumed by the much more revolutionary forms of bureaucratic innovation that were just around the corner. History quickly revealed that it was the PR officer, and not the protestors, the unions, or the students, who had better understood the shifting patterns of social organization.

At the time of the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation in 1974, Marker notes, not a single protest against the disgraced president took place. Why would they? Television was enough. This was the era of conspiracy films, the kind of cinema that the 1970s are far better remembered for—vast corporate networks, murky links between faceless government agencies, assassination attempts, and a general feeling of nameless panic, a kind of PSYOPS turned inward on the United States. Street protests came to look as historically outdated as the storming of the Bastille or the Russian revolution. Marker's skill is to be able to capture the radical emotion and genuine anger of the international late 1960s and early 70s, as well as document their equally rapid collapse. Ultimately, to present defeats without being defeatist. "Some



Clockwise from top left: TV jackpot, bombing Vietnam, Paul Vergès, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Shah of Iran, slaughter.

A Grin Without a Cat. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. DVD: Icarus Films.



Clockwise from top left: Black Panther, Citroën manager, Douglas Bravo, Fidel Castro, Salvador Allende, Jean Vilar.

A Grin Without a Cat. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. DVD: Icarus Films.

wolves still survive," as the 1992 addendum has it, even as he lists a whole host of new terms that demonstrate the permanently altered nature of the global context (AIDS, Glasnost, Ayatollah, Reaganism).

Marker presents the "bitterness and madness from which some would never recover," the period in which the flashpoints and confrontations soured into self-recrimination, factionalism, and, in France at least, the strange spectacle of students shouting abuse ("down with the bourgeois festival!") in August 1968 at the director of the Avignon theater, Jean Vilar, a person who, as Marker points out, had done more for popular theater than anyone else. Marker compares this curious choice of scapegoat to a violent prisoner beating up a fellow inmate because it is impossible to reach the guard. But it is hard not to also see it as an attack on the very medium of communication that the theater, however "popular," increasingly came to represent: outmoded and elitist compared to both the allure of cinema and the instantaneous and constant information stream of television.

TANGLED UP IN THE IMAGE

It is in relation to the age of live television that one extreme offshoot of this tumultuous period must be understood. The Red Army Faction members were children far less of Mao than of Coca-Cola, if not, as Jillian Becker's infamous arch-conservative account of the group, *Hitler's Children*, has it, of evil itself. In their violent acts, and the (usually) careful selection of their victims, the spectacle became the very place of politics. When the group blew up the Springer newspaper offices, they were competing far less for the emancipation of the world's proletariat than for a particular angle on the news, for a Germany that will admit its complicity in imperialism, and its failure to truly de-Nazify. Unlike Marker's complex film essay, Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, based on the best-selling account of the group by Stefan Aust, gives itself over fully to the spectacle in which its subjects played a substantial role. But, in the age of the multi-million-dollar action movie, how to represent "terror" without perversely celebrating it? Perhaps it is no longer possible to escape the cinematic desire to revel in destruction. One complaint surrounding Edel's film upon its release in Germany, especially among relatives of those killed by the group, was that it glamorized their actions. But this very sexiness was a core part of the Baader-Meinhof show—miniskirts, girls with Kalashnikovs, open sexuality, drug-taking—and this is unsurprisingly stressed in the film, with its careful attention to clothes, cars, and other period details. The most striking scene in this regard comes when the group are training in Jordan with the PLO's Al Fatah organization.

The Baader-Meinhof show

The Baader Meinhof Complex. © 2008 Constantin Film Produktion GMBH, Nouvelles Éditions de Film S.A., G.T. Film Production S.R.O. DVD: Momentum Pictures (U.K.).

Sunbathing naked on top of their barracks, the *fedayeen*, supposedly unused to the sight of bare female flesh, take offence, failing to understand Andreas Baader's argument that "fucking and shooting are the same thing."

Baader-Meinhof, formed in the year of Marker's turning point, 1967, after the death of Benno Ohnesorg at the anti-Shah demonstration in Berlin, were as blunt as Baader's statement and Edel's film portrays them, even with the reflective and depressive Meinhof as their increasingly paranoid intellectual spokeswoman. It should be noted that history has played a trick on Baader-Meinhof that Marker might have noted wryly, had the information being available earlier: in May 2009 it was suggested that the policeman who killed Ohnesorg was not merely a "fascist" West German policeman, but was in fact also working as a spy for the Stasi. Baader-Meinhof was perhaps born of at least one misreading of events. However, if there is one thing that the group remained true to it was the idea that even if there were old and new styles of fascism, the continuities were clear. Renamed the Red Army Faction, the group's fatal attacks on Hanns-Martin Schleyer, a former SS officer turned powerful industrialist, and their attempt to internationalize their struggle by making links to the Palestinian cause, suggest that, whatever their tactics, Baader-Meinhof and its sympathizers saw clear links between Nazism and aspects of German life in the late

1960s and 70s. And this later era's imperialism was to be greeted with the same degree of violence which it meted out to those it colonized and exploited. While Edel's film depicts the bloodshed, subsequent arrests, and prison life extremely well (a little too well, perhaps), it is not particularly good at placing and explaining the emergence of the group's politics and their explicitly anti-Nazi and anti-imperialist position. To be sure, such an exposition would have been difficult to achieve in narrative terms, in among all the hold-ups, car thefts, and hunger strikes, but the film's lack of political context has the unfortunate effect of making the members of Baader-Meinhof and the Red Army Faction look more nihilistic and idiosyncratic than they actually were: it is not for nothing that in 1971, 51% of the German population considered the organization's members to be political fighters. *The Baader Meinhof Complex* gets tangled up in its own image, a quasi-fictional thriller masquerading as official history, and vice versa. To capture political action without either celebrating its excitement or denouncing its extremism is a difficult task.

In the end, and despite all the glamor and guns, some of the most effective scenes in Edel's film take place in courtrooms, where the brittle confrontational attitude, hard language, and complete disrespect for legality on the part of Baader-Meinhof show up the pomposity and stultification of a judicial system that has not yet come to terms with its own recent past. In the mockery of legal language and imperialist hypocrisy, *The Baader Meinhof Complex* demonstrates the continued relevance of the group's ideas, if not their tactics.

WHERE IS THE LINE?

Jacques Vergès, the subject of Barbet Schroeder's *Terror's Advocate*, has a similar attitude as Baader-Meinhof did toward the legal system. The only difference being that, rather than sitting in the dock, he is defending the accused. The son of a French diplomat and a Vietnamese mother, brought up in Réunion, a French *département* in the Indian Ocean, Vergès was "born at war, born colonized," as one of the interviewees puts it. (There is an interesting link with Marker's film: Paul Vergès, Jacques's twin brother and founder of the Communist party on Réunion, is interviewed about the place of Vietnam in the global struggle.) Jacques Vergès is most famous, or rather infamous, for being the lawyer who defended the Nazi war criminal, Klaus Barbie, as well as Carlos the Jackal, Slobodan Milosevic, and Saddam Hussein (almost). But his early cases, the ones that Schroeder focuses on in particular, reveal a rather more consistent political position: for France to prosecute those engaged in anticolonial struggle, it is necessary to first admit her own crimes. When defending Djamila Bouhired, the revolutionary who fought alongside FLN Commander Saadi Yacef (both of whom feature in Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 *The Battle of Algiers*, with Yacef playing himself) against the charges of terrorism, Vergès practiced his famous "rupture defence," attacking the trial process and the dirty hands of the prosecuting country, rather than specifically defending his client.

Strange charisma
Terror's Advocate. © 2007 Yalla Film/Wild Bunch.
DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

Schroeder's documentary sheds skewed light on a figure entangled in the extreme end of twentieth-century politics, rather cleverly allowing the curious object of his study to reveal his own smoothly argued but problematic moral (and legal) code. At the beginning of the documentary it is announced that: "this film is the director's point of view on Jacques Vergès, which may differ from the opinions of the people interviewed in it." But the interesting thing is how little the director's point of view intrudes. Vergès, an amazingly young looking eightysomething, with immense reserves of wit and charisma, basically has the stage to himself. A man of strange disappearances and even more unsettling friendships (he went missing between 1970–78, rumored to have been staying with his friend Pol Pot in Cambodia, but seen in Paris and elsewhere) as well as infatuations with his female clients (he married Djamila Bouhired and was close to German terrorist Magdalena

Animals against power
A Grin Without a Cat. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis.
DVD: Icarus Films.

Kopp), he presents an intriguing political position: can countries with dirty hands and colonial histories really prosecute those individuals who fight against them? Of course Vergès' charismatic anticolonial provocations quickly fall away when it becomes clear that, more often than not, he defends the indefensible merely for the sake of it—asked whether he would have defended Hitler, he replies, quick as a flash: "I'd defend even [George W.] Bush, but only if he agrees to plead guilty." In the end, Vergès claims that there is an all-important "white line" which he would never cross, but it is not at all clear what this line is, who drew it, or what lies beyond it.

The strength of Schroeder's hands-off approach is that it reveals Vergès in all of his strangeness, but at the same time allows you to note the tricks of history and the strange confluences that permitted him to have access to, to defend, and often to succeed in freeing genuine revolutionaries as well as thugs, tyrants, and dictators. That Vergès found it so easy to slip between defending those on the left and on the right should play a part in any summation of the politics of the twentieth century, both those captured by cinema and those neglected by it.

THE HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

We are at once too close to the turmoil of the 1960s and 70s and yet too far, not knowing whether to remain within a world caught in its own spectacle or to attempt to escape the frame entirely. All three films show that history has a way of surprising those who try to shape it. Marker's peerless ability to combine new footage, found material, literary and cinematic references is a testament both to his power to synthesize and to his ability to create tone: the simultaneous celebration of political struggle and the melancholy of defeat is rarely captured elsewhere. That Marker's many hands tremble without dropping the camera points to a historical strength which is at the same time an admission of its fragility. It is one thing to remain at the level of historical ambiguity, and quite another to be undone by it. Both *The Baader Meinhof Complex* and *Terror's Advocate* suffer for being unable to decide what kind of ambiguity they want to portray—weak moral condemnation combined with an admission of terror's spectacular allure is the overriding affect of *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, while *Terror's Advocate* washes its hands too cleanly of its subject: Vergès ends up running the documentary, just as he would a courtroom. While Marker's film is one of the earliest attempts to deal with the politics of the 1960s and 70s, it remains the most relevant because most keenly attuned to the political power of editing itself. Some wolves still survive.

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ABSTRACT This essay discusses three films which in different ways reflect on left-wing militancy in the late 1960s and 70s—Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex,* Chris Marker's reissued *A Grin Without a Cat,* Barbet Schroeder's *Terror's Advocate*—and argues that Marker's is the most insightful.

KEYWORDS *The Baader Meinhof Complex, A Grin Without a Cat, Terror's Advocate,* Chris Marker, 1968

DVD DATA *The Baader Meinhof Complex.* Director: Uli Edel. © 2008 Constantin Film Produktion GMBH, Nouvelles Éditions de Film S.A., G.T. Film Production S.R.O. Publisher: Momentum Pictures (U.K.). £17.99, 1 disc.

A Grin Without a Cat. Director: Chris Marker. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. Publisher: Icarus Films. $29.98, 1 disc.

Terror's Advocate. Director: Barbet Schroeder. © 2007 Yalla Film/Wild Bunch. Publisher: Magnolia Home Entertainment. $26.98, 1 disc.

WARM-BLOODED: *TRUE BLOOD* AND *LET THE RIGHT ONE IN*

J. M. TYREE DISCOVERS CONCEALED HORRORS AND UNUSUAL INTIMACIES IN THE CURRENT SCREEN VOGUE FOR VAMPIRES

In his now-classic Marxist essay on horror fiction, "The Dialectic of Fear" (*New Left Review*, November–December 1982), Franco Moretti compares *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* vis-à-vis each novel's complicity with conservative social orders. "Monsters are metaphors," Moretti writes, and "the vampire is a metaphor for capital," albeit not a simple one. To Moretti, Count Dracula acts more like a monopoly capitalist than a corrupt Byronic aristocratic. As a foreign presence he threatens England with a new model of life-draining efficiency, but this terrifying vehicle of exploitation is itself destroyed by restorative forces of reaction, tradition, and religious superstition. Stephen King makes a similar point in his 1981 nonfiction study *Danse Macabre*, in which he notes that horror fiction is typically "as conservative as a banker in a three-piece suit." Indeed, the two classic American authors associated with the horror genre, Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, were conservative to the point of intolerance.

In the recent spate of youth-culture vampire movies, these political questions about the horror genre remain relevant. They connect the present renaissance to recognizable ancestors such as *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*. Both of these 1987 films opened on the same week; both films model their vampire clans as a kind of alternative tribal unit that must either colonize the American family or be destroyed attempting to do so. Both films end their narratives with order restored, but *Near Dark* memorably takes its antisocial energy into a radical zone.

Other productions—the 1977 *Dracula* starring Frank Langella, Joss Whedon's teenage television epic *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), not to mention spoofs and satires like *Love at First Bite* (1979)—often self-consciously target the old politics of the undead. In Guy Maddin's take on the genre, *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002), a filmed version of Bram Stoker's novel as adapted by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 1998, the original story is teased for its sexual and political conservatism. *Dracula*, as revisited by Maddin, is a parable about "polluted blood"—contagious sexual or blood-borne diseases from deviant eastern immigrants. "Fear of the other as regards the beloved," Maddin says in an interview on the DVD, a tidy summary of sexual politics. Horror expert David J. Skal notes in a documentary accompanying Universal's *Dracula: The Legacy Collection* that the catchphrase of the 1897 novel—"The blood is the life"—echoes both Leviticus and the advertising motto of a patent remedy for syphilis.

The obvious and transgressive sexuality involved in the vampire subgenre has a tricky political side. Classically, being under the spell of a vampire involves effacement by seduction into an exploitative relationship between an omnisexual seducer and a parade of slave lovers—male and female—who are viewed as both interchangeable parts and as natural resources or blood banks. The homoeroticism of vampires, on the other hand, is as longstanding as it is problematic. In a key scene at the start of Tod Browning's 1931 *Dracula*, Bela Lugosi banishes his three female vampire companions so that he can feast on Jonathan Harker's blood himself, after an evening of male-on-male mesmerism. (In the Spanish version of *Dracula*, filmed at night on the same set with a completely different cast, this scene replays without the banishment of the women, helping launch a mini-genre of raunchy Mexican female vampires, a B-picture tradition exploited later by Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino in 1996's *From Dusk Till Dawn*.) The way a victim gets "unclean" from a vampire bite involves illicit intimacy, and these pictures run the gamut of marginalized sex acts contained in the political unconscious: premarital hook-ups, gay and bisexual relationships, adultery, cheating, polygamy, S&M, the sexuality of children, and the hovering specter of quasi-willing sexual violence. A genre featuring centuries-old characters attacking

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very young women sometimes clumsily evokes pedophilia—what is Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), mall-friendly hero of the teen blockbuster *Twilight* (2008), doing in a high school anyway?

In her 1995 study *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (University of Chicago Press), Nina Auerbach says that each age "gets the vampire it deserves." Such a claim begs certain questions about our own age and its vampires in two other, rather more compelling 2008 screen fictions: the sad-eyed Eli (Lina Leandersson) in Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In*, and the dashing Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer) in HBO's hit series *True Blood*. They make up, together with Edward, a trio that prefers to help rather than hurt the person who is supposed to be their prey—although this reversal is not wholly new (*Near Dark* depicts similar behavior to great effect). If they're not busy saving their human pals from other vampires, they can act as protectors against scary forms of human male attention. Edward, Bill, and Eli embody a new combination of undead chum and unnaturally attentive lover, a sort of guardian angel with fangs. All three remain willing to "wait for the right moment" rather than forcing the issue of sexual congress. And none wishes to make more vampires—they know what a drag it is not getting old.

Edward is the perfect gentleman. He struggles successfully to resist smoldering jailbait come-ons, and he can move at lightning speed from driving a car to opening its passenger door for his date. Bill is literally an old-school Southern gent—his good manners derive from his upbringing in Antebellum Louisiana. You can definitely bring him home to granny. Even Eli makes for a useful, if homicidal, ally in a case of school bullying. Plus she's a whiz at the Rubik's Cube. Does the new vampire, then, have the potential to stand in as a metaphor for our age's fantasies of non-exploitative tolerance and relatively equitable love relationships? The conservatism identified by Moretti and King satisfies as an assay of *Twilight*, but *True Blood* and *Let the Right One In* are more multifaceted.

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Film scholar Adam Lowenstein argues in *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (Columbia University Press, 2005) that horror pictures can display "allegorical moments" in which historical traumas are confronted in weird and surprising ways. *True Blood* positions itself as a loose but obvious allegory about the mainstream acceptance of so-called "alternative lifestyles"—it's about tolerance and integration of many kinds, using the vitriolic American debate over gay marriage as a touchstone, while linking it with the Southern reaction against civil rights. The first season involves Bill's attempt to "mainstream" in Bon Temps, an undead-unfriendly small town in Louisiana. The action centers on protagonist Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin), a plucky mind-reading waitress who falls in love with Bill at a time when vampires are being lynched. The semi-futuristic setting involves a world in which the development of artificial blood by scientists has allowed vampires to come "out of the coffin" and assimilate into society as "Vampire Americans." The opening page of Charlaine Harris's 2001 novel *Dead Until Dark*, on which the first season is based (season 2 draws from the follow-up novel *Living Dead in Dallas*), delivers up a semi-spoofed version of liberal identity politics. Sookie's jaunty voice asks, "We had all the other minorities in our little town—why not the newest, the legally recognized undead?" In season 1, Bon Temps looks on as Vermont legalizes vampire–human marriages.

"A minority element if there ever was one," vampires "are prejudiced against," wrote Richard Matheson in his 1954 novel *I Am Legend*, the source material for the Charlton Heston vehicle, *The Omega Man* (1971). "All he does is drink blood . . . but would you let your sister marry one?" *True Blood* contains its share of a similarly winking tone, including a send-up of Bill's love of Cambodian pop music, renditions of the voicemail greeting on his cell phone, and a depiction of his pastime of playing Wii golf with his vampire buddies on the Pebble Beach course. When a fellow "life-challenged" chap, Eric Northman (Alexander Skarsgard) complains to Bill—"I texted you three times!"—old-fashioned Bill is forced to admit that he just can't get his head around the idea of using the number keys as letters to type. "I promised your grandmother," Bill tells Sookie apropos of a visit to a vampire nightclub, "that no harm would come to you at Fangtasia tonight." This courtliness is both silly and hot, in a "Yes, Ma'am," country music kind of way. But while *Twilight* is free abstinence-until-marriage advertising for conservative American family values, *True Blood* is more akin to the menu of late-night cable.

True Blood owes something to the Anne Rice/Neil Jordan vision of *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), especially the bayou mansion settings and the sexed-up vamping of Southern aristocrats. *True Blood* also contains a crossover element of B-movie softcore, and it shares Rice's embrace of gay relationships and open bisexuality among vampires. The show often has the flavor of a pole-dancing kit bought at a "sex positive" boutique for private, monogamous use, like the tame, bisexual S&M of *Interview with the Vampire*. *True Blood* wears its sexual liberalism on its sleeve. The resistance movement to vampire rights is formed out of the ideological dregs of fundamentalist Christianity—"God hates fangs," reads a sign in the credits. The fake commercials and vampire-rights

TRUE BLOOD: FROM COMEDY TO HORROR

True Blood: The Complete First Season. © 2009 Home Box Office. DVD: HBO Home Entertainment.

campaign spots included in the DVD extras are wittier than the show itself. Admittedly, *True Blood's* tones often clash, using the vocabulary of gay rights to serve a central heterosexual love affair, although probably the show desires a more universal view of civil rights. With its emphasis on Bill's mainstreaming, *True Blood*, like creator Alan Ball's previous series, *Six Feet Under*, might be accused of a certain type of gay-friendly conservatism—the vampires who reject assimilation are rather nasty. But the allegory is loose enough to contain paradoxes and contradictions. There's violence and anger among the marginalized population, although the prime source of evil in season 1 is a human serial murderer (Rene Lenier, played by Michael Raymond-James). At its most complex, the show focuses on the dynamic gay character of Lafayette Reynolds (Nelsan Ellis), an unpredictable, irrepressible, and impish figure, a short-order cook, male prostitute, and drug dealer whose disruptive intelligence upends any neat parable of assimilation.

The provocative credit sequence of *True Blood* presents a disturbing mixture of predatory sex and violence that exists at odds with the show's liberalism and suggests a desire to pursue darker storylines. It's reminiscent of the herky-jerky scene at the beginning of Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983), with its intercutting of a monkey attack. Even at full speed, the naked eye senses something amiss in the *True Blood* credit sequence among the legible images of smeared road kill, striking snakes, closing Venus' flytraps, children in Klan costumes. *True Blood's* credits show don't-blink sequences of contorted naked bodies doing unclear but unsettling things, each of which is preceded by an arty dash of blood that appears splattered across the viewfinder, as though the filmmaker was on hand. A tidy précis for the show: during the credits, the viewer assimilates intertwining images of sex and violence before inviting *True Blood's* vampires into the home. The credits' abbreviated menace anticipates a series of creepy tableaux of violence that swirl uneasily in the stew of *True Blood*. Sookie is able to return to work with implausible soap-opera-logic alacrity after witnessing the aftermath of her grandmother's brutal murder in her home. We must credit Sookie, who is somewhat in the Sarah Michelle Gellar mold (although less kick-ass), with the same kind of moxie that caused Buffy's mom to call her "brave, resourceful, and kind to others in a crisis." Some viewers might feel more traumatized than the character by the vision of that blood-soaked floor—or must this gut reaction be suppressed as an "inappropriately" prim response? This scene and more than a few others like it—a female vampire feeding on the head of a human at Fangtasia, for example—don't have the same feeling of enjoyably gory and even comical "chill" brought on by Sam Raimi's *Drag Me to Hell* (2009). This is something different, and it's not particularly uncanny—it's horrifying rather than terrifying.

The horror only becomes fully fledged in the later episodes of season 1, when Sookie's brother Jason (Ryan Kwanten) and his sociopathic vegan girlfriend, Amy Burley (Lizzy Caplan), kidnap, tap, and finally kill a kindly older gay vampire, Eddie Gauthier (Stephen Root). Vampire Eddie's tortured cries from his basement prison intermingle with sex scenes in which the couple trip through a hallucinogenic sensual world after taking V, the druggie nickname for vampire blood, for humans a sort of magic-mushroom Viagra. Here, the tones of the show become darkly dissonant. Is the viewer supposed to bliss out with the couple and recognize the vampire's subhuman or ex-human status? Eddie is one of the most sympathetic characters in the whole season. Things get murky here—and interesting. As when a vampire hideout is firebombed, leading to the production of charred and oozing coffins, when Eddie is killed, *True Blood* manages to broach an unusual kind of horror, that inflicted *on* and not by vampires.

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"We still have our fangs," says one of predatory aristocrats in Ingmar Bergman's *The Hour of the Wolf* (1968). Can the same be said of the contemporary vampire picture? As counterpoints to the perennially resurrected big-budget vampire extravaganza, like Francis Ford Coppola's overreaching *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), more compelling figures in the last three decades arguably spring from bargain productions like George A. Romero's *Martin* (1977), *Near Dark*, and Guillermo del Toro's first film, *Cronos* (1993). These three films share a kind of dirty realism in common with *Let the Right One In*, a film which relies on austerity and a stripped-down language of visual information drawn from ordinary life. Its vampire, the eternally twelve-year-old Eli, is convincingly lonely, retaining childlike sensibilities. "Don't you get any birthday presents?" Oskar (Kare Hedebrant), her temporarily twelve-year-old playmate, asks—and Eli is ashamed to answer "no." Some of the film's memorable images are shots of its characters pictured in the architecturally odd setting, a suburban Swedish housing development outside Stockholm. Alfredson's interview on the DVD makes clear his keen interest in the look and feel of the public square of this housing development during the 1980s: the socialist concrete look in winter, which Alfredson calls "halfway behind the Iron Curtain." The camera pauses in school staircases, hospital corridors, swimming-pool locker rooms and the flat, frozen exteriors of lifeless-looking apartments. (In important ways, the film resonates with the bleak location

Love in a cold climate

Let the Right One In. © 2008 ETI. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

shooting of *Near Dark*.) It's a banality that gradually turns eerie, the Nanny State as empty nest. "It's very Swedish," Alfredson says.

The baroque excesses in the novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist on which it is based have been carefully excised. Some critical confusion attended the release of *Let the Right One In*, in part because of a decision to remove the back story of the novel, which features flashbacks to Eli's origin as a vampire. In the film, Eli explains that she's been twelve for a long time, and one brief shot reveals what she means when she says that she's "not a girl." The book relates the castration of Eli, called "Elias" two centuries prior, at the hands of a sadistic vampire. In the film, Eli moves into the estate with a male companion that some mistook for her father, but who is in fact a lover whose pedophilia takes an even-more-monstrous turn in the second half of the novel.

The term "realism" is perhaps an odd one to suggest adding to the description of a vampire film, and certainly *Let the Right One In* has its share of camp gross-outs. But it is up to something else as well, resting on a simple premise—what if a vampire boy who has adopted the persona of a vulnerable twelve-year-old girl moved in to the less glamorous suburbs of Stockholm in 1982 and there fell in love with a human twelve-year-old boy who is being violently bullied at school? The core of the film involves such simple and memorable conceits as a tender moment between Oskar and his mom when they are brushing their teeth together, Oskar sniffing and wearing his dad's red sweater, Eli's bare feet padding in the snow, plus the budding affair over a Rubik's Cube and a little shy dancing in front of mom's turntable. One deleted scene has the lovers teasingly baring fangs to one another as a form of harmless love play. Shots linger on their hands touching or about to touch, the film's replacement for the prurience of the genre, which it studiously avoids.

Despite Eli's best efforts to drive him away, Oskar appears ready to replace Eli's older lover after Eli saves Oskar's life from bullies at a swimming pool. Before that, Oskar saves Eli's life from a would-be attacker who has discovered her pathetic little bathroom nest. After aiding and abetting Eli's feeding for the first time, Oskar is panicked, but he doesn't mind a grateful kiss from her bloody lips as they stand over the murdered corpse. (In a touch characteristic of the film's subtlety, he plays with his toy cars afterwards when he's alone in his room.) Oskar's own homicidal tendencies are hinted at in the film and emphasized in the novel. "Sure," Oskar replies in the book when Eli asks him if he would kill someone if he could be certain of getting away with it. (The film makes this more ambiguous: "You'd murder if you could, to get revenge, right?") So it's clearly possible to read the ending of the film as an inverted but sincere into-the-sunset romance. Oskar travels by train to parts unknown while exchanging Morse Code messages with Eli through the lid of a cardboard

Vampire heritage

Top: *Vampyr*. © 1932 Danish Film Institute. DVD: Criterion Collection. Bottom left: *Let the Right One In*. © 2008 ETI. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment. Bottom right: *True Blood: The Complete First Season*. © 2009 Home Box Office. DVD: HBO Home Entertainment.

box—so this is a pair of escaped lovers headed into an uncertain future. The film's premise builds up carefully through small gestures: they care for each other very deeply, each has saved the other's life, and they are bound by a kiss in blood. "To me it's a happy ending," Alfredson says. Or maybe just a case of mutual compatibility?

"I'm nothing," Eli explains in the novel. "Not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl. Nothing." Oskar's reply shows his remarkably single-minded devotion: "*Will* you go out with me or not?" Eli's declared and actual lack of gender is very different from the forced denial of unbearable urges by Edward in *Twilight*, although both remain chaste for the moment. Her relationship with Oskar brings to mind the female vampires that form a minor alternative tradition of their own, stretching back from *Interview with the Vampire* to *The Hunger* and ultimately back to Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), with its loosely adapted source material in Sheridan LeFanu's 1872 lesbian vampire story *Carmilla*. The *Dracula* strand of the myth remains so dominant in film and literature that Stoker was trotted out in notices of *Let the Right One In*. In fact, the two works can only be usefully compared by inversion. The ruined castle becomes an apartment block with cheap fixtures, the rain-lashed ship headed for Whitby becomes a taxi moving through heavy snow, the vampire's coffin resting place becomes a bathroom spot beneath a covered window, like the child vampire's hideaway in *Near Dark*. In *Carmilla*, however, it is possible to detect intriguing points of overlap. Both stories begin when a young motherless girl moves into a new house and starts an all-consuming "friendship" with another young person living there. "Your looks won me," LeFanu writes, in a passage that could describe the chaste love scenes between Eli and Oskar. "I climbed on the bed and put my arms about you, and I think we both fell asleep."

LeFanu remarks of Carmilla's victim in her isolated home: "How great an event the introduction of a new friend is, in such solitude." (One chill in Stoker involves the way Count Dracula uses the word "friend" interchangeably to refer to English people and English books.) Vampires, and those who have dealings with them, have a deeply ingrained lonely status, whether it's Count Dracula forcing his way into English society, Buffy amid the castes and schedules of Sunnydale High, the isolated artist and his wife at the center of *The Hour of the Wolf*, the lost wanderer, Allan Grey (Julian West) in *Vampyr*, or Jesus Gris (Federico Luppi), who, after turning vampire in *Cronos*, says, "I feel like I don't belong at all."

A vampire as often as not starts off as a fast friend of a younger person in deep distress about their hopes for love or lasting affection from the living—in *Let the Right One In*, *True Blood*, and *Twilight*, vampires appear among a series of desperate, lonely, trapped, bored, or isolated dreamy younger persons. The traditional vampire is a false friend, the one whose magnetic personality and all-absorbing attentiveness turn out too good to be true, leading to an even lonelier place filled with life-draining abuse and manipulation. The "cruel love" described in *Carmilla* records the perennial sense of early vampirism at the hands of a ravishing older lover who appears cold to the touch and dead of human sympathy at a critical moment. When this effect is cooked up sufficiently with an added comic sensibility, the results can be effective, as in the long course of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

But this pattern of seduction and betrayal is not all that goes on in the latest incarnation of the vampire myth—in fact, rather the opposite is the case. Against enemies living or undead, Edward, Bill, and Eli will defend the fragile bodies of their younger living lovers, and their reasons for doing so go beyond a vested interest in having self-replenishing bags of fresh blood around for themselves. They aren't false friends. What they truly desire most is something very different—they wish for an end to their interminable loneliness. In this they hearken back to the sorrows of Bela Lugosi ("There are far worse things awaiting man than death") and Klaus Kinski ("It's more cruel not to be able to die") in Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom of the Night* (1979).

At times there is a striking pathos about these new vampires and their sad plight. *True Blood* and *Let the Right One In* add genuinely creepy and transgressive elements to the vampire canon, while *Twilight* adds only humorlessness. But in one striking respect all three productions add an element of domestication, perhaps bringing them into the orbit of Moretti's account of *Dracula*'s conservatism. What happens when the vampire you're seeing no longer threatens your life?

Domestication

Top: *Let the Right One In*. © 2008 ETI. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment. Bottom: *True Blood: The Complete First Season*. © 2009 Home Box Office. DVD: HBO Home Entertainment.

Such is the case in Matheson's *I Am Legend*, which features the protagonist's mocking pity for the children of the night: "Pore vampires," he thinks as he contemplates them surrounding his safe house, "pore little cusses, pussyfootin' round my house, so thirsty, so all forlorn." As it happens, none of the three newer vampires needs the blood of their chosen lover to live at all. Edward and his family, in a cheap dodge, feed from animals—perhaps that's what lends them their odd pallor, which goes unnoticed by the townsfolk where they live. Oskar, we presume, might well enjoy or at least tolerate the fetching of blood for Eli from somewhere or other; whether the charm will wear thin in time remains open to question, but isn't something of the same true in all love relationships? As for Bill Compton, he enjoys the pleasures of Sookie Stackhouse's neck as much as she enjoys his fangs, but he gets his sustenance out of a bottle.

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ABSTRACT An essay about the 2008 vampire boom, from the bland teen favorite *Twilight* to, more notably, *Let the Right One In* (which combines "dirty realism" with a misfit love story) and the TV series *True Blood* (whose liberal politics of tolerance for minorities opens up to less easily classifiable forms of sex and violence).

KEYWORDS *Twilight, Let the Right One In, True Blood,* vampire films, horror films

DVD DATA *Let the Right One In.* Director: Tomas Alfredson. © 2008 EFTI. Publisher: Magnolia Home Entertainment. $26.98, 1 disc.

True Blood: The Complete First Season. Various directors, including Alan Ball. © 2009 Home Box Office. Publisher: HBO Home Entertainment. $59.99, 5 discs.

A SUBTLE STORY: *35 SHOTS OF RUM*

YVETTE BÍRÓ FINDS EMOTIONAL NUANCE, NARRATIVE ECONOMY, AND POETRY IN A FAMILY DRAMA BY CLAIRE DENIS

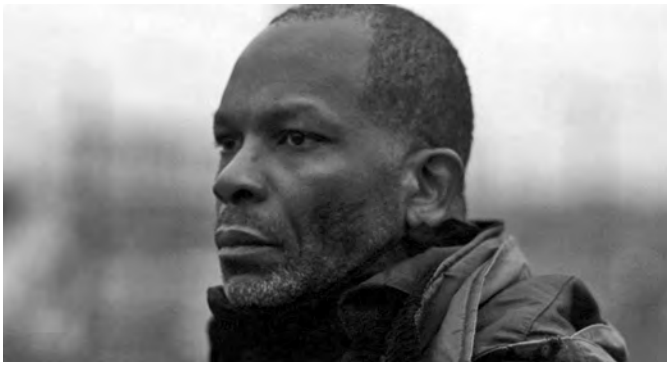
Claire Denis chose a sublime source of inspiration in paying homage to Yasujiro Ozu in her *35 Shots of Rum*, but of course the film is not a "remake." It has a tone of tender, elegiac simplicity that evokes Ozu's unadorned depth and complexity, a tone that is not found in Denis's earlier, "wilder" pieces. However, Denis's characteristically unconventional, leaping narrative style to which we have grown accustomed as a result of films such as *Nénette and Boni* (1996) and *Beau Travail* (1999) is recognizable from the very outset.

35 Shots of Rum creates a self-contained world. Denis renders palpable the fullness of an ordinary, silent closeness (the characters seem to have no language for their feelings). The protagonists are intimately bound together, but an unspoken pressure is beginning to be felt. The storytelling is uneventful, almost plotless, a sequence of small daily rituals. But it amounts to "a sort of tragedy, in a family sense," as the director puts it in a *Senses of Cinema* interview.[†] Tragic because it depicts the most decisive emotional drama, separation, as it shakes the balance of an undisturbed, harmonious life.

The film focuses on the orderly life of an odd couple, a middle-aged, widowed father, Lionel (Alex Descas), a railway engineer and his daughter, Joséphine (Mati Diop). Their tiny, everyday habits are faultless: showering, laundry, rice-cooking, idling affectionately in the kitchen after a day's work. Their life has warmth and tenderness, encompassing close relations with two neighbors: Lionel's former lover, Gabrielle (Nicole Dogué) and Joséphine's boyfriend, Noé (Grégoire Colin). As always in Denis's movies, all the characters seem dynamic, sensual, vital, emanating energy and tension as well as suggesting an authentic past.

The setting is an unidentified part of the outskirts of Paris, just a commuter train's distance from the metropolis. The neighborhood is almost exclusively black, but this is not a dreary *banlieue* slum. Denis avoids any direct social criticism and the dramas of marginalization: "my main desire was to make it simple and solid . . . calm, since all the characters are black, and I wanted to make it very clear that they do not live like clandestines. They have real lives, they are settled, they are French." The apartments are tidy, elevators function. People are on good terms with one another, but this doesn't exclude personal tensions below the surface: jealousy, unfulfilled desires.

Instead of a more familiar depiction of social and economic circumstances, *35 Shots of Rum* offers a vibrating play



Waiting for the commuter train
35 Shots of Rum. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. DVD: Arte Editions (France).

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Alex Descas and Claire Denis
Courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

of emotions. Father and daughter are very close to each other; their rapport is singular and touching, although the feeling of inevitable disruption hints at a doleful solitude. Kind and hopeful, cab driver Gabrielle seems to hold onto a past desire for Lionel. Tensions surface in small, slight signs in a remarkable restaurant scene: a cloud on Lionel's face when he sees Joséphine and Noé kiss; not-so-young Gabrielle's look of disappointment when Lionel turns his attention to the beautiful young Antillean woman who serves them.

Small, everyday troubles—for joy cannot permanently go undisturbed, even if open conflicts are avoided. *35 Shots of Rum* has a remarkable richness of ambience, which gives an unusual, intangible kind of content to the film. The rhythmic ebb and flow of existence, the depth of a gaze, the expressive density of a gesture, the sudden beauty of a poignant nightfall which brings silence into the smoothness of everyday practicalities. Even tragedy, a coworker's suicide, happens softly, without much ado. Lionel finds his body on the train tracks, but we have not seen the death occur.

TWO OPPOSITE METHODS CREATE HARMONY

Instead of significant plot events, Denis relies on other forms of storytelling order: repetition and ellipsis—two seemingly opposite structural devices which work together in *35 Shots of Rum*. As for repetition, there is a particular emphasis on the regular breathing rhythm of the physical environment. Rattling commuter trains pass in the darkness. Endless railroads like metal serpents criss-cross, then extend into the distance. High-rise windows glow in the night. The environment is dense and full of movement and sound. The trains go back and forth regularly, inward and outbound, returning again and again. Agnès Godard's camera lingers on objects, studied from different angles, often subordinating people to the structures and vehicles which accommodate them and provide framework.

When it does, however, focus on people, the camera gets close to characters without shaking. Denis comments: "It's not Ozu. I spoke with Agnès about bringing back Ozu, but obviously I would not have set the camera like him. I felt the film demanded a certain type of calm, and also handheld, so

it's sort of breathing." "I thought that if the camera were shaky," she adds, "it would make their life shaky." A marvelous remark! Any effect of restlessness in the camera work would have been a harsh interruption of the close observation (using a 40mm camera lens sometimes) of rhythmic movements, whether human or mechanical.

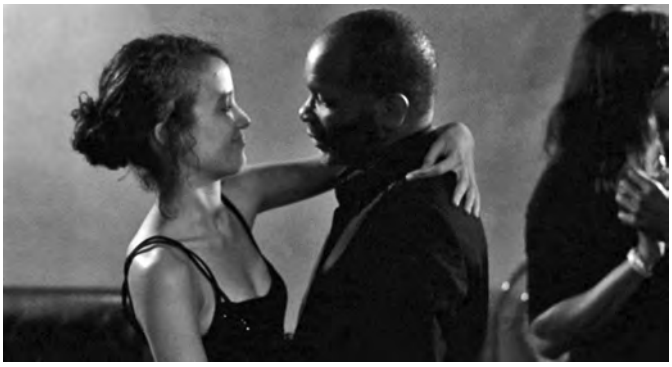
The opening image—Lionel's view of the railroad from his driver's compartment—is exemplary. The shiny tracks curve and branch out mysteriously while suggesting a tangled order. The shots of the tracks are prolonged and the effect is to suggest both far-away horizons and ordinary routines. Thousand-times-recurring events (sitting in a crowded carriage, waiting to meet someone off the train) become, because of the governing rhythm, poetic—the human existence surrounded by power supplies and intricate machines. The overall sense is not of a threatening, stressful mechanical world so much as natural respiration, life's tempo. Human activity is quietly smooth in turn. Denis emphasizes the way in which everyday activities—pushing clothes into the washing machine, cooking and eating food—rarely involve turbulence, excitement, vehemence.

Yet so much is expressed and disclosed in the simple modulations of gesture and emotion. Small details gain a remarkable, memorable power. This is especially true of the restaurant scene, which occurs after Gabrielle's car breaks down on the way to a concert and she, Lionel, Joséphine, and Noé seek shelter late at night in the rather dingy establishment. The Antillean welcomes them, serves a meal, and afterwards they dance. Joséphine dances with both her father and her boyfriend, but the way she puts her arms around each of them is *so* different: shy embarrassment with Noé after they have kissed, an almost apologetic and overly warm embrace with her father. The repetition of the gesture makes room for meaning, which might otherwise be elusive, through slight variation. It is the same with Gabrielle. It is never made explicit that she longs to resume the relationship with Lionel, but she invites Joséphine to her apartment, likes to smoke with her on the doorstep, and at the end, suddenly appears, getting dressed as "mother" for the wedding. Nuance is important; minor variations to repeated actions, which are never quite the same. People are not robots.

Variations always involve omission. If the proceeding does not mechanically follow the former version, it means that some passages are missing, having been replaced with other elements. *35 Shots of Rum* invites the spectator to enjoy both the pleasure of recognition and some surprise. In this way, we discover how many fragments and particulars constitute a whole event. Yet the elegance of ellipsis has another, more courageous dimension in Denis's film, which has the audacity to withhold—to an unusual degree—background information about past events, motivations, ties. It takes a while before it is clear that Lionel and Joséphine are father and daughter. There is no scene which "explains" Lionel's past relationship with Gabrielle. Near the end of the film, it is a great surprise when father and daughter travel to her mother's grave in Germany. Equally unexpected is Noé's arrival (at the film's conclusion) to collect Joséphine, both of them dressed in wedding clothes. We have learned almost nothing about Noé, apart from references to work in Africa and the fact that he is planning to leave the apartment where he lives; and even though he and Joséphine have kissed and danced, and we have seen her moving around his apartment with utmost familiarity, there has never seemed to be a strong emotional connection between them. Yet we can accept that they belong together. It is fascinating that Denis achieves this effect of credibility while practicing such economical storytelling.

Even the film's title is cryptic. Among co-workers as he drains lined-up glasses, Lionel refers two times to the significance of ritually drinking thirty-five shots of the liquor, but he never finishes the explanation. Is it important to know? Would it add anything to the depiction of the workers' relationship? Not at all. Telling the same story for the second time without the "payoff" accentuates the sense of comradeship, where conversation is not investigation or explanation. Here again, repetition and ellipsis go hand in hand.

The unfolding events deliberately avoid the heavy-handed, overly formal tripartite order of choice: intention—execution—consequence, so mechanical and boring. We rather jump into new situations without being warned; comprehension has to occur retroactively. Chronological continuity is not important in *35 Shots of Rum*. Time is not marked; occasionally the narrative jumps forward. Denis prefers "associative montage": scenes follow one another without the usual narrative logic. Instead they seem connected by a subtle emotional logic. The continuation of an action is often neglected or deliberately delayed. Nothing has prepared us for the sudden cut to Lionel and Joséphine in a big blue van heading to Germany. Later we understand the serious emotional importance of this visit, especially when Joséphine takes flowers to her mother's grave. Tender intimate moments and a few weightless words pass between the father and daughter. Thus a sad and painful event has been commemorated in advance of a significant coming event. It is a scene, we realize subsequently, of farewell. Farewell to a basic family order in the nest of the father's



35 Shots of Rum. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. DVD: Arte Editions (France).

Family bonds

Top two: *35 Shots of Rum*. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. DVD: Arte Editions (France). Bottom two: *Nénette and Boni*. © 1996 Dacia Films/ La Sept Cinéma. DVD: Strand Releasing.

home. The impending marriage is not mentioned, but afterwards we see how it is being prepared for in this scene of goodbye. It is emotionally prefigured rather than verbally explained. The uneventfulness and economy, the difficulty in naming feelings and motivations, the farewells, combine eventually to create a melancholy mood. It is a complex, internal, ordinary sadness. It involves a certain kind of suspense as we start to sense that bonds between characters are being broken as well as created.

POETIC SENSUALITY

Although the tone is different, quieter, in other respects *35 Shots of Rum* summons up memories of two earlier great works by Denis: *Nénette and Boni* and *Beau Travail*. These films also involve fragmentation, repetition, and storytelling restraint. A strong sense of the "lightness" of being in time —the intertwining of past and present, memory and fantasy, reality and artifice—is conveyed in all three films (the flowing music of regular collaborators Tindersticks adds to the effect).

In *Nénette and Boni*, the early image of a streaming-haired girl floating in water immediately represents a life of drift in a lyrical, sensual way, enabling us to identify with her state of existence. Nénette (Alice Houri) is lonely, sulky, silent. Her unwanted pregnancy is not explained, but its narrative significance is momentous for the "enfants terribles" theme (which even allows for the possibility of incest). Boni (Grégoire Colin) is at first horrified and angered by his sister's mysterious pregnancy. But as he gets used to the idea, he is unexpectedly excited by the prospect and increasingly attracted to Nénette and the baby.

Initially, his awakening adolescent impulses and desires are represented in the scene where he starts kneading the pizza dough, more and more vigorously, heatedly, as if it were a sexual encounter with a woman. This scene seems to take place in a mundane reality, but it is also strongly metaphorical, representing his interior fantasies. As the film proceeds, however, any clear distinction has broken down. By the time he whips out a gun at the end, we feel the consistency of his unbridled and juvenile temper, and that emotional rigor counts for more than the question of whether this is real or fantasy. Does it matter to know? Deeds and illusions jointly make up people's existence.

In *35 Shots of Rum* we have only once a scene in which imagination and reality are unmistakably blurred. There is a strange fantasy sequence near the end in which Lionel is galloping on horseback with Joséphine sitting in front of him, her arm round his neck—evoking Goethe's *Erlkönig*—which

Meaning in action

Top two: *Beau Travail*. © 1998 La Sept Arte/Tanaïs Com/SM Films. Bottom two: *35 Shots of Rum*. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. DVD: Arte Editions (France).

seems at first glance entirely out of place. But its visual power is suddenly staggering, poignant. Shortly afterwards they head off to Germany, but we cannot erase the power of the former vision. It colors the unfolding events. The last time father and daughter are seen together on-screen is a tight close-up of his hands fastening a necklace around her. The image is minimal, expressive, and unexpected. It sums up the most restrained embrace *and* farewell.

In the totally unclassifiable *Beau Travail*, there is a similar merging of remembrance, imagination, and an unmistakable physicality—the cruel, beautiful, ballet-like military drills in the desert. The voiceover narration maintains a semblance of temporal order, a kind of continuity, but it cannot for a moment interrupt the hallucinatory effect (sorrowful recollection, bad dream?). As with *35 Shots of Rum*, Denis is singularly successful in creating an oneiric and emotional world that is built up out of banal, specific, precisely observed small actions. It is remarkable how these "minor" details, when stitched together, achieve a haunting, spellbinding poetic power that is embodied in certain convulsive movements. The frenzied, amazing dance by the disgraced legionnaire, Galoup (Denis Lavant), at the end of *Beau Travail* is very different from the dancing in *35 Shots of Rum*, but in both cases we are aware of a crucial feature of Denis's filmmaking: a sublime sensuality. In *35 Shots of Rum* no less than in her other work, we understand emotion and human meaning because we contemplate the power and vitality of human bodies in action. Strong or frail, young or old, pretty or scarred, black or white, still or sweating, these bodies reveal the physicality of existence, the effort, the operating refinement, the rudeness if needed—but also the tenderness in their activity, its emotion, a "beautiful work."

† Darren Hughes, "Dancing Reveals So Much: An Interview with Claire Denis," archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/09/50/claire-denis-interview.html. All Denis quotes in this essay are taken from this interview.

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ABSTRACT This review argues that Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum* combines repetition and ellipsis to harmonious effect in telling a minimalist story about a Parisian father and daughter. Comparison is made with *Beau Travail* and *Nénette and Boni.*

KEYWORDS Claire Denis, *35 Shots of Rum, Beau Travail, Nénette and Boni,* film aesthetics

CREDITS *35 Rhums*. Director, writer: Claire Denis. Producer: Bruno Pesery. Writer: Jean-Pol Fargeau. Cinematographer: Agnès Godard. Editor: Guy Lecorne. Music: Tindersticks. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. U.S. distributor: The Cinema Guild

ROMANCING THE FATHER IN CLAIRE DENIS'S *35 SHOTS OF RUM*

JAMES S. WILLIAMS EXPLORES THE QUIET PLEASURES OF A PARIS STORY WHICH REWORKS YASUJIRO OZU'S *LATE SPRING*

The freewheeling, nomadic intensities of Claire Denis's films are among the marvels of contemporary cinema. Coming fresh from *The Intruder* (2004), an epic haul across continents and oceans that constantly threatens to veer off into abstraction, *35 Shots of Rum* (2009) seems by contrast a rather sedate and even slight Parisian chamber piece. Unlike Denis's earlier *Nénette and Boni* (1996), with its ambivalent and sometimes explosive central relationship between estranged brother and sister, this new film offers an affectionate illustration of blood ties and domestic tranquility. It is a warm and tender, almost mellow, portrait of working-class family life in northern Paris, where a necessary stage in the human cycle—the moment of separation between father and daughter, Lionel (Alex Descas) and Joséphine (Mati Diop)—is engineered smoothly and delivered on time. Nods to extreme desire, fantasy, and death are brief and dispatched with minimum fuss and little of the suspense or dread that usually propels Denis's work. The suicide of a newly retired train driver, René (Julieth Mars-Toussaint), is very clearly signposted and ultimately downplayed since it has already occurred. Similarly, a short fragment of father and daughter on horseback galloping along train tracks is introduced as fantasy in the most prosaic of terms ("Whenever I feel low I think of my daughter," Lionel remarks to René). Nothing, in fact, that constitutes Denis's naturally porous, elliptical style is allowed to obstruct the precisely modulated flow of this intimate and meditative family drama. The governing tone throughout is one of deference and calm predictability, the comforting routine of commuter trains in steady motion and intersecting at regular intervals providing a formal unity.

35 Shots of Rum presents a view of contemporary France that is a far cry from the bleakness of immigration and urban dislocation conveyed in Denis's earlier Paris-based films such as *No Fear, No Die* (1990), about two illegal black immigrants who turn to cockfighting in the badlands of the outer suburbs, or *Trouble Every Day* (2001), where the *banlieue* is rendered an intermediate wild zone where even cannibalism occurs. The film portrays a working-class black milieu as a firmly rooted and settled community. Rather than displacement and marginality, what is important here are the daily working lives of an entirely legal and "normal" stratum of Parisian life. Joséphine ends up marrying literally "the boy next door," Noé (Grégoire Colin), thus ensuring close proximity with her father, a train driver on the suburban RER network, in the same building in the rue de la Guadeloupe where he raised her as a child. Denis would seem to be playing it unusually safe and straight here. This is not to say, of

Working the tracks
35 Shots of Rum. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. DVD: Arte Editions (France).

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Claire Denis, Grégoire Colin, and Mati Diop
Courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

course, that *35 Shots of Rum* does not look and sound like a Denis film in its beautiful, patient evocation of life's shared daily experiences: cooking rice, riding in a taxi. For if it lacks the scale and formal extravagance of her previous work, many of the determining features of her fluid visual style are still in evidence: the poetic images of passage and transience, the capture of immediate physical sensations, and the attention to multiple textures and the tactile materiality of things. See, for example, the soothing blue and grey hues used to portray the cozy family nest, or the way the low winter rays hit the tracks leading through the northern suburbs toward what Denis called very suggestively during a phone conversation with me (July 2, 2009), an "opening" of the light. Witness, too, the sensual delicacy and devotion with which Lionel caresses his daughter's bare shoulders and clasps her hands. Yet without the brooding tensions and suspense normally established in her films from the outset, these gentle moments do not generate quite the same charge or mystery.

It should be noted that *35 Shots of Rum* involves many of Denis's usual collaborators: photography by Agnès Godard, script co-written with Jean-Pol Fargeau, music by Tindersticks (a set of variations on a recognizable theme), and regular actors Descas and Colin, complemented here by new additions Diop and Nicole Dogué as importunate neighbor and surrogate mother Gabrielle, who still holds an emotional torch for Lionel, and the great film actress Ingrid Caven as the German aunt. Descas has often played misfits in Denis's films, of course, from the doomed Jocelyn in *No Fear, No Die* to the outcast scientist Léo in *Trouble Every Day* and the single parent Théo in *I Can't Sleep* (1994) who ekes out a living as a musician and dreams of returning to Martinique. What demarcates *35 Shots of Rum* so conclusively from other Denis films is precisely the primacy and respect accorded the paternal figure. The father in Denis's first feature, *Chocolat* (1988), is a distant colonial archetype, usurped in his daughter France's affections by the household "boy," Protée, who plays both a maternal and paternal role until he chooses dramatically to terminate the relationship. The protagonist of *The Intruder*, Louis, treats his one available son negligently and embarks on an impossible search for another he abandoned long before, happy in the end to accept any young Polynesian man claiming a filial connection. *35 Shots of Rum*

35 Shots of Rum. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. DVD: Arte Editions (France).

thus presents for the first time in Denis's work a "real" father in all senses of the word. Lionel opens the film watching and driving trains, and he successfully closes it by duly completing the strange drinking ritual alluded to in the title. Personified in the impassive, weathered figure of Descas, it is the always attentive and almost passive, "soft" presence of this father—as when he collects his daughter after her evening shift and transports her home carefully on the back of his motorbike—that provides for the film's inner calm and consistency. The unexpected road trip late in the film to Lübeck, Lionel and Joséphine's last journey together as father and unmarried daughter, might appear to break that mold and send the film spinning off in new directions. However, the express aim here is to maintain Joséphine's contact with her elderly white German grandmother and with German culture in general. It is thus easily recuperable as filial bonding, and indeed there is a sense of familiarity, even painterly prettiness, in the shots of children carrying lamps along the shore in the early dusk that recalls, for example, the painting *Carnation Lily, Lily Rose* by John Singer Sargent.

The full measure of the film's preternatural serenity is conveyed in the brilliant set-piece scene in the restaurant where a sudden surge of physical desire is peremptorily cut short before it can explode into being. I am referring to the moment of mutual seduction between Lionel and the beautiful African owner, played by Adèle Ado, who has eyed him up, and he her, from the moment (following the breakdown of Gabrielle's car on the way to a concert) he walked in from the rain with Joséphine, Noé, and Gabrielle. They dance together to the Commodores' hit, "Nightshift," a tribute song to the memory of the soul singers Jackie Wilson and Marvin Gaye which establishes a mood at once resigned and celebratory, cheerful and sentimental (it tells of leaving the "dayshift," life on earth, and starting the "nightshift" in heaven where the departed will remain "forevermore" in contact with the living). The idea of shifting corresponds to the structure and function of this scene where relationships are reconfigured and desire safely channeled following the clear lead of the father and his gesture of passing Joséphine on to Noé. This is a beautiful illustration of Denis's cinema of the senses: a precise choreography of movements and bodily rhythms, shot for the first time in the film in emotive close-up, with facial expressions, glances, and feelings running from anxiety to jealousy under the orange candlelight. There is a strong sense here that things have been quietly and efficiently worked out and through. Having been confronted following René's suicide by the fact that time is passing inexorably by (Denis told me that René is a "character condemned to death" and serves as nothing more than an "alarm clock" in the narrative), Lionel ensures through his signals and actions that Joséphine, Noé, and himself can start a fresh chapter in their interconnected lives. As Noé says the morning after (when he also finds his cat dead and thus the last material link with his parents now gone): "Everything's going to change." The one person left out of this neat scenario is, of course, Gabrielle, who is cast in the role of spectator left to rue her earlier insistence on playing loud for Lionel's benefit a song entitled "I Can't Live without You" in her taxi before it all-too-symbolically broke down. Lionel does not return home that night, although no one comments on this (Denis indicated to me that his new affair would probably be totally "empty" and "unimportant"). However, his work has already been done. Noé has finally been able to express his love for Joséphine, even if she instinctively draws away from his kiss; and she will finally make her own decision about marriage upon discovering he will leave definitively unless she makes a decision. Crucially, Lionel does not tell his daughter what to do, or allow anyone else to arrange her affairs (Gabrielle exerts in the end no influence). The decision—or better: calculation—to marry is Joséphine's alone, and the door is closed on the viewer when she arrives toward the end of the film at Noé's apartment (it is typical of Denis that we never know for sure if it is Noé she actually marries, although we are invited to presume so).

The flipside to such explicit symbolism, however, is the way potentially fertile textual connections are curtailed. Consider, for instance, the way the title of the book that René gives back to Lionel in the café lies tantalizingly just out of vision. The one exception to this general restriction—an overt reference to the Martinican-born psychoanalyst and political theorist Frantz Fanon during the sequence at Joséphine's university class—seems rather gratuitous and purely academic, like much of the strangely stilted discussion on the North/South divide, Third World debt, and Joseph Stiglitz led by the teacher played by Stéphane Pocrain, former spokesperson of the French Green Party. (Denis explained to me that she included Fanon, whose 1952 *White Skin, Black Masks* directly inspired *No Fear, No Die*, simply because she was told by university professors during research for the film that his ideas of revolutionary violence were no longer relevant to today's political situation and she thought this regrettable.) In fact, race is not really an issue at all in *35 Shots of Rum*, where the sole reference to French black culture is the radio station, Tropiques FM, although, of course, the simple fact of portraying freely and without a pre-set agenda the quotidian reality of one of France's many immigrant communities is rare in itself for a French film. To return to the fantasy horseback sequence

already mentioned, Denis links this to Goethe's poem, *Erlkönig*, about a father carrying heroically although in vain his dying son who is hallucinating the fearsome Elf king of the title. As such it adds weight to Joséphine's German background, yet for this viewer the link is too vague and fleeting to have any thematic value, all the more so because divorced from the Schubert lied by which it is best known.[†]

RECONFIGURING OZU

Despite such missed intertextual connections, *35 Shots of Rum* in fact involves an intensive engagement with what constitutes a virtual primal scene for Denis. I am referring to Yasujiro Ozu's 1949 classic, *Late Spring*, a film which, as Denis already stated in her contribution to the 1993 tribute film, *Talking with Ozu* (included on the Criterion edition of *Tokyo Story*), brought into clarity her own family history as soon as she saw it during an Ozu retrospective one summer in Paris and was totally overwhelmed (she talks in her celebration of Ozu of a "personal connection" with the film although does not elaborate). Denis has insisted in interviews for *35 Shots of Rum* that the central story is that of her mother, brought up as an only child by her Brazilian father, a fact that explains, perhaps, that Joséphine seems to have mixed-race origins (the virtually all-black cast corresponds likewise to the racial homogeneity in Ozu). In a filmed interview with Léa Rinaldi (see learinaldi.com), Denis presents the film explicitly as "a variation on the theme of my grandfather while thinking of Ozu," for what particularly interests her in *Late Spring* is its representation of the "strong yet awkward" father figure that resonates so powerfully with her own family background. In conversation with me she spoke in more general, humanistic terms of a kinship with Ozu, her "human friend." *35 Shots of Rum* is thus an intensely personal story of authorial respect and admiration for Ozu under the sign of the Father that also honors the universal and revelatory aspects of cinema itself. It is why the film runs so deep and, as it were, invisibly, even to the point of appearing an inversion of her cinematic method, and it goes beyond any obvious links that one may choose to make, for instance, between the fate of René seeking "deliverance" and the suicide in 2005 of the pioneering independent producer, Humbert Balsam, who produced *The Intruder* and whose tragic passing delayed the completion of *35 Shots of Rum*. If, as Denis has said, the film proved so easy to shoot and edit, it is perhaps because it had already been immaculately conceived during that first indelible viewing of *Late Spring*.

Based on a story by Kazuo Hirotsu, *Late Spring* concerns a dutiful young woman Noriko (Setsuko Hara) living in the suburbs of Tokyo with her fifty-six-year-old professor father, Shukichi (Chishu Ryu). A plot is hatched by her father and scheming aunt to arrange her marriage, and the turning point is the uninterrupted, eight-minute performance of a Noh drama during which Noriko suddenly becomes aware of her father's apparent interest in an attractive widow and realizes he may not actually need her after all. She agrees to marry although the painful and "unnecessary" separation has the impact of a tragedy. She has regressed from a loving, smiling daughter in the first part of the film to a resentful young woman who collapses inward. As for her father, after the wedding he returns home alone and peels an apple, letting the peel fall symbolically to the floor. He has essentially sacrificed his daughter, and the happiness of their being together, for the sake of family honor and convention.

Despite the obvious differences in historical, social, and cultural context, notably regarding class, the parallels between *35 Shots of Rum* and *Late Spring* are many, above all the presence of certain key motifs such as trains (including footage of the entry into Tokyo), views of the domestic exterior and interior (in particular the inside corridor), bicycles and the beauty of movement, the ritualized methods of family greeting, rice-cooking and meals together, even the figure of repetition itself (ambiguous in Ozu, a matter of joy in Denis). There is also the same reduced pace and quiet interiority of characters, the subtle changes in facial expression and body language, the shared sense of melancholy, the discreet use of the symbols and metaphors of daily life, and odd moments of physical grace. Certain episodes correspond exactly: for example, the Noh play and the "Nightshift" sequence, the final trip together to Kyoto and the journey to Lübeck (both feature a scene where the pair sleep side-by-side like lovers), an abortive concert, and the focus on preparations for marriage rather than the ceremony itself (in Ozu's case we never even glimpse the anonymous fiancé, while in Denis's film Noé is virtually absent in the final scenes having fulfilled his function). Yet the differences are just as significant. The jealousy that Noriko suddenly experiences and which turns into anger is transposed by Denis into the motivations of a totally new character, Gabrielle. Further, the perpetual discourse of duty and morality—"Be a good wife"—is completely absent in Denis's film, where speech, already minimal, is limited to an individualist message (Lionel to Joséphine: "Think of yourself").

Stylistically, both films are elliptical and lyrical in different ways. Compare the impressionistic touches of the sea and natural beauty which consolidate the love and respect between father and daughter in *35 Shots of Rum* with the more traditional landscape shots in *Late Spring* like the tourist views of the shrines in Kyoto (Ozu's film ends with waves lap-

Family sacrifice
Late Spring. © 1949 Shochiku Co., Ltd. DVD: Criterion Collection.

ping on the beach at dusk in a sad replay of Noriko's earlier carefree scenes at Chigasaki). Moreover, Denis avoids the plaintive leanings and over-scorings of Ozu's soundtrack, preferring instead to keep to a more neutral and evolving set of musical variations. It is, however, in Denis's decision not to imitate Ozu's trademark fixed framing at floor or low-eye level that the difference between the two films is most noticeable. For even if there are clear links in composition and mise-en-scène, Denis's framing is entirely her own. In addition, if Denis presents the interior of the apartment in Ozu-like minimalist terms through what she calls "simple static shots of domestic grids," she continually seeks to move beyond that by means of creeping, forward-tracking shots which, even if they seem to be heading nowhere in particular, convey a constant sense of forward development that positively embraces the forces of time and change so often refused or avoided by Ozu's characters. This mobile frame epitomizes her desire to purify the film of any traces of unnecessary drama or melodrama, as when she cuts clean through the "Nightshift" scene.

Hence, if *35 Shots of Rum* privately honors Ozu, commemorating specifically his ambivalent figuration of what she described to me as the "familial yet secretive" father who corresponds so well to the myth of Denis's own grandfather and justifies the nostalgic tune of "Nightshift," it should be viewed less as proof of a personal connection to *Late Spring* than a personal correction and decisive shifting of Ozu. For Denis's account of a relationship where neither daughter nor father gives anything up as such reverses Ozu's tragedy of enforced separation and emotional confusion. Indeed, it begins as if already on the other side of trauma, beyond questions of morality, passion, or recrimination and on track toward a new level of understanding and joyful resignation. Lionel's final casual revelation that he may have made up the eponymous drinking legend, followed by the last shot of him unpacking another rice cooker (the cooker

Another configuration

Café Lumière. © 2003 Shochiku/Asahi Shimbun/Sumitomo/Eisei Gekijo/Imagica. DVD: ICA Projects (U.K.).

that Joséphine had purchased at the start but did not acknowledge due to the embarrassment of duplication), suggests both closure in the form of a ritualized and self-reflexive in-joke and faith in the active powers of invention. Compare Denis's transformative approach to Ozu with that taken by another contributor to *Talking with Ozu*, Hou Hsiao-hsien. The opening, prologue-style shot of his 2003 film, *Café Lumière*, a very self-conscious homage produced on the centenary of Ozu's birth, is a stationary view of a suburban train station with overhead lines. This is a virtual replica of the first shot of *Late Spring*, as if Hou needed first to formalize the terms of his admiration before rehearsing perennial Ozu themes such as urban solitude and the differences between the generations. Further, in contrast to the subjective, hand-held, forward-tracking shots of the rails in *35 Shots of Rum*, Hou keeps his characters relatively static as they are shunted along in the criss-crossing subway trains of central Tokyo.

What is remarkable and impressive about Denis's figuration of the father in *35 Shots of Rum* is that it is so benign and affirmative, in sharp contrast to *Late Spring* where adherence to the patriarchal law and social obligations harms the protagonists. If, as Denis often states, desire is the realm of death and violence, she would appear here to be feeling her way toward a new artistic territory beyond aggression and subversion by means of the purposeful accommodation of social forms and laws. Joséphine chooses to work creatively within existing social norms in order to safeguard her love for her father. In the serene world of this film, such accommodation is a measure of autonomy rather than conformism. By deregulating and romancing the Father, and all the while assuming the risk of sentimentality, *35 Shots of Rum* successfully negotiates and reinvests familial structures and social prohibitions. This is what ultimately makes the film so powerful and significant, the result of a brave experiment by Denis to shift the aims and ambitions of her practice. Reports of her new film, *White Material*, suggest that it marks a return to fragmentation and violence. It remains therefore to be seen whether the radical technique of *35 Shots of Rum* turns out to be an isolated experiment in restraint and harmony.

† Compare *Beau Travail* (2000), for example, which revolves around Herman Melville's novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* and Benjamin Britten's opera on the same theme, and is sustained throughout by concrete references to Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1961), including publicity stills, through the magisterial presence of Michel Subor as Bruno. *Beau Travail* exemplifies Denis's acute sense of a rich cinematic imaginary that she consciously plugs into in a method formalized as "grafting" (*greffage*) in *The Intruder*, a film inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy's autobiographical text of the same name about undergoing a heart transplant. (For a fine account of the relations between Nancy's text and Denis's film, see Douglas Morrey, "Open Wounds: Body and Image in Jean-Luc Nancy and Claire Denis," *Film-Philosophy* 12, no. 1 [2008]: 10–30.) Small fragments of an aborted film by Paul Gégauff, *Le Reflux* (1965), appear there as so much tissue transplanted on to a strange cinematic body and only imperfectly integrated—enough, however, to present tangible memories of a younger Subor who plays Louis. Indeed, a Denis film usually "lifts off" organically by means of a tough masculine-identified nexus of intertextual influence that demands diffusion and poetic abstraction and must be actively unbound and sublimated via new forms (for Denis the cinematic screen is by nature masculine). Both *Beau Travail* and *The Intruder* illustrate Denis's success in negotiating and working thorough accreted layers of male influence, melancholy and crisis. The more functional and entirely reasonable associations of *35 Shots of Rum* would seem, by contrast, to offer no such possibility of intertextual fantasmatics or poetics. I have explored Denis's gendered intertextuality in detail in "O heave! O heave away, heave! O Heave!": Working through the Author in *Beau Travail*," *Journal of European Studies* 34, nos. 1–2 (2004): 44–59. 16.

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ABSTRACT This article explores how *35 Shots of Rum* (2009) marks a radical shift in Claire Denis's method both formally and thematically. Through a highly personal homage to Ozu that decisively "corrects" *Late Spring* (1949), Denis romances the figure of the Father in order to move beyond violence and fragmentation.

KEYWORDS Claire Denis, Yasujiro Ozu, Hou Hsiao-hsien, intertexuality, paternal romance

CREDITS *35 Rhums*. Director, writer: Claire Denis. Producer: Bruno Pesery. Writer: Jean-Pol Fargeau. Cinematographer: Agnès Godard. Editor: Guy Lecorne. Music: Tindersticks. © 2008 Soudaine Compagnie, Arte France Cinéma, Pandora Film Produktion. U.S. distributor: The Cinema Guild.

UNEASY DREAMS

***Life During Wartime* (Todd Solondz)**
***White Material* (Claire Denis)**

Two very different films screened at this year's New York Film Festival share some unexpected similarities. In each a gifted director revisits his or her earlier work. In the opening scene of Todd Solondz's *Life During Wartime*, a sequel (though with a different cast) to his black comedy *Happiness*, tearful Joy confesses to husband Allen at their anniversary dinner: "I'm not upset; just a little déjà vu." The same might be said of Claire Denis, who in *White Material* reworks the themes of her first feature *Chocolat* (a white woman in Africa) and of the later *Beau Travail* (the queasy homoerotics of soldiering) from a retrospective perspective. While *Life During Wartime*'s conflict is metaphorical, taking place as it does in placid Florida, a suburban non-place beset nonetheless by fears that range from pedophilia to terrorism, *White Material* is set during an actual and bloody civil war in an unnamed African country. Here Isabelle Huppert's Maria seeks bravely and blindly to harvest the coffee crop in her plantation as violence rages around her.

The two features are ambivalent in their politics. Solondz satirizes both the Jewish suburbanites who have never visited Israel but wish to be buried there and the wealthy metropolitans who hang framed pictures of stone-throwing Palestinians on their pristine walls. Denis also refuses to direct her audience, leaving us unable to decide if the insurgents are freedom fighters or butchers, no better than the merciless regular army they are combating. When the rebels first enter Maria's plantation home, easing gingerly into overstuffed armchairs and leaving muddy tracks in the shower, we see that some are barely bigger than the guns and machetes they shoulder. Denis's child soldiers are thus the distant siblings of Solondz's precocious youngsters, also thrust too young into uneasy adulthood.

Both films offer a fragmented exposition and a fractured family. *White Material* begins with three haunting and unexplained images: in an eerie interior lit only by flashlight a dead African man (the rebel leader) lies on a bed; a tattooed white man (who will prove to be Maria's crazed son) crouches in a burning room; and Maria herself, tense and drawn in a pale pink sun dress and with wispy red-blonde hair pinned up, hitches a ride on the back of a bus through an ominously arid landscape. In flashback, we see her again, her hair now loose, ecstatically riding a motorbike. Denis alternates these dynamic traveling shots with tight, unforgiving close-ups of Huppert's pale freckled face. It will only be an hour into the film, when we are introduced to her docile ex-husband (Christopher Lambert, who, appropriately enough, once played Tarzan in *Greystoke*) and her feckless son (ex-model Nicolas Duvauchelle), that we discover that the desperate Maria is not as alone as she at first appeared.

Solondz, too, begins with unanchored and disquieting scenes. The anniversary dinner between Joy (*Topsy-Turvy*'s Shirley Henderson) and Allen (*The Wire*'s Michael Kenneth Williams) ends when the latter's polite request to hear the specials leads the waitress to spit in his face. A blind date between Trish (*The West Wing*'s Alison Janney) and Harvey (*Barton Fink*'s Michael Lerner) is followed by Trish's confession to her precocious son Timmy that her companion turned her on just by touching her elbow. ("Are you still wet?" he asks, concerned.) Only much later do we learn that Trish and Joy are sisters (like the pair in *Happiness*). When a desperate Joy seeks out Helen (Ally Sheedy), a wealthy third sister, in L.A., Solondz indulges in some of his funniest satire. Formidably egotistic, Helen claims to be "crushed by the enormity of [her] success" and manages to make Joy feel guilty for her own neglect of the family she left behind. Back in Florida, Joy, in pre-Raphaelite hair and calico nightgown, sleepwalks through palm-fringed parking lots to a diner called

Fractured imagery
Life During Wartime. Courtesy of Film Society of Lincoln Center.

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An ominous landscape
White Material. Courtesy of Film Society of Lincoln Center/Wild Bunch.

More than Burgers. The perky server notes nothing strange, enquiring "How many will you be?" to her solitary deranged customer.

In these disorientating environments, where narrative is oblique and motivation obscure, both directors coax fearless performances from their casts. Huppert, often just chilly, here opens up under Denis's sympathetic direction, even as her character is in thrall to obsession. Solondz, who, according to the press notes, sometimes directs his actors from beneath the tables at which they so often sit, makes sure that eccentricity never slips into caricature: as the timid Joy, Henderson is especially subtle. Great cameos also abound. Charlotte Rampling is a self-described "monster," who pays released pedophile Bill (Ciarán Hinds) for sex. Medusa-tressed and gimlet-eyed in a hotel bar, her first words to him over a tinkling piano are: "Please tell me you're straight." Paul "Peewee Herman" Rubens plays Joy's ghostly dead husband ("I'm missing my laserdisc collection"), who joins her in the humdrum diner.

Slipping imperceptibly into fantasy, both films create a kind of trance-like reverie within an everyday setting. Denis's Africa, never exoticized, remains surprising in its surreal landscapes: bare feet crackle over burnt banana trees; ominous smoke rises, muddily, into the blue sky; a severed goat's head is found among harvested coffee beans, black and red. Solondz delights in lurid yellow hotels and sugar-cube white condos. His camera pans, repeatedly, over a lushly planted park to linger ominously on the blurry image of a child. These are dream landscapes, where actions nonetheless have very real results. When the army takes back the plantation from the rebels in *White Material*, they silently slaughter the child soldiers, who lie, drugged or asleep, on the French family's comfortable furniture. When Joy decides, in *Life During Wartime*, to return to the husband she has left, we hear her leaving a message for him on the answerphone: "I'm on my way. I love you." Solondz pans over to where he lies dead on the floor with a bullet in the brain.

These arresting images combine with expert soundtracks. Denis gives us reggae on the local radio station, toasted over by a DJ, who predicts the arrival of the rebels. But mainly she exploits the delicate drones and rich percussion of Tindersticks, the British band that is now her frequent collaborator. Solondz seeks more jarring discontinuities: "Matchmaker, Matchmaker" (from *Fiddler on the Roof*) plays as podgy Harvey romances Trish, to the disgust of her son Timmy; while Jewish liturgical music accompanies the scene when the child discovers that his father Bill is not dead, but was imprisoned as a pedophile.

Finally, then, both films are ambivalent. Who is responsible for the bloodbath that ends *White Material*? Maria's stubbornness may be unsympathetic, but her determination to harvest the crop remains more admirable than her family's paralyzing inertia. And Denis neither romanticizes Africans nor demonizes white settlers, suggesting that the wounds of colonialism are deeper and more complex than that. Solondz's conclusion is also inconclusive. After a climactic scene of family celebration (the only one at which all three sisters are shown together), Bar Mitzvah boy Timmy, in a sky-blue suit, apologizes for wrecking his mother's chance for happiness by falsely accusing her suitor of pedophilia. Waxing Talmudic, Timmy asks: "If you can forgive without forgetting, can you also forget without forgiving?" The answer he himself gives is "yes," but only when what you forget is a trauma too terrible to remember. A little upset and a little déjà vu, *White Material* and *Life During Wartime* reveal, in their different but complementary ways, that conflict, whether in Africa or Florida, is at once fatally confusing and intensely compelling.

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INTERVIEW WITH PEDRO COSTA

This is an edited version of a conversation I had with Portuguese director Pedro Costa, October 8, 2009, on the occasion of the U.S. premiere of *Ne change rien* at the New York Film Festival. The film is a documentary about Jeanne Balibar, the French actress who is now also pursuing a career in music. In *Ne change rien*, we see her rehearsing and performing both rock and nineteenth-century opera (Offenbach's *La Périchole*). At one point, two Japanese women are seen in a café, but apart from this unexplained shot, the focus stays on the singer and her collaborators, notably her band, the pianist who plays at the Offenbach rehearsals, and her singing teacher whose voice we hear during one of the film's long takes.

James Hansen: How did you meet Jeanne Balibar?

Pedro Costa: We met seven years ago at a documentary film festival in Marseille. We were both on the jury. We spent all our time together, seeing films, and immediately knew we shared more or the less the same opinions. And, of course, I admired her as an actress. She's probably the European actress that I admire the most. During the festival, she told me she was going to record an album of songs she had composed with friends. She told me that she was getting a bit disappointed with film. Some projects had fallen through and she was starting to refuse others.

She asked me if I would do a music video for one of the songs. I think she had the idea of asking other filmmakers too. I never did the video, but I didn't want to disappoint her. I came to see a concert she did in Paris and I liked it very much; I liked the music, I liked her voice. I asked her when she was doing her next concert and I came to the next concert with a friend, Philippe Morel, who did the sound on the film, and I brought a small DV camera and we shot that concert. Then, one thing led to another. I came to see her rehearse and then by chance one of my films was opening in Tokyo and she was doing a concert in Japan at the same time. So I organized some cameras very quickly, and that was it.

So those are the concerts we see in *Ne change rien*?

The first shot you see in the film is actually the first shot we filmed at the first concert. Then you see two or three songs from concerts and bars. Those were mainly in Japan. Everybody asks me: "What are those two Japanese or Chinese men doing in that scene?" They say the shot seems mysterious. It is because we were in Japan.

At what point did you stop shooting and start editing?

We started shooting in 2007 and then finished up a year later. Sometimes when I'm shooting—especially when I was working on *In Vanda's Room*—I have some doubts (and still have them). Will it be a film or just something for my archive? I was planning to give it to Jeanne like a gift. And then I spent some time in the editing room watching the material with my friend who did the sound. He said: "You know, there's some very nice stuff with Jeanne. You should try to do something. A real film." So I sat down and watched everything. It wasn't a lot—eighty hours—and I thought perhaps we could do something a bit different about music, not the usual concert film or the usual documentary.

Some shots are quite distant, but particularly one of the opera sequences is a very tight close-up. How much did you plan the camera setups?

I had no preconceived ideas. But I like music and have been involved in music a little bit. But there never was a music film that really inspired me. I had references though: Godard and also Frank with the Rolling Stones, Warhol, and then some plain classical filming of two or three operas I like. In this case, for the concert, I had a lot of cameras. I mean, I

Chanteuse close-up
Ne change rien. Photo: www.pedro-costa.net.

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Jeanne Balibar and Pedro Costa
© Valerie Massadian.

was afraid. I had six cameras. Two cameras on each side, one front, one back, and some others. And then watching the material again, we decided to just use one—mainly the one I was operating, facing the stage. There was a lot more work involved in the rehearsal sequences: camera angles and positions were tricky. For the opera, we saw the rehearsal and the complete opera, but what you see is a third representation: just the pianist and the door. That was all completely intentional.

The digital, high-contrast black-and-white is very striking. When did you decide to shoot in black-and-white?

Well, every filmmaker has this dream of doing a film in black-and-white, but it's less and less possible each day. I heard that Kodak is dropping the black-and-white negative stock. It's a shame. For this film, there's really no mystery. It was shot on color since it's video. It was edited more or less in color. And then, one day, watching the long, nine-minute shot of the opera rehearsal she does with her teacher, the editor and I . . . we just kept feeling something. It was a shot where Jeanne moved a lot, her neck and her mouth. Just by chance, I don't know what it was, but we turned the color button on the monitor and something appeared in black-and-white that was not there in color. The veins, the nerves—it was more sensual, more physical. Even her skin began to show things. So we thought this is great in black-and-white. You can feel it.

I had already thought of black-and-white mainly because I couldn't control the concert lighting. And I hate rock-concert lighting. Even with great, great bands that you admire, they mess up the lights. It's very psychological: the guys start shouting and it goes red; it's very intimidating or shocking. I mean, it's exactly like film today. It's all about the 3D effects. Flashy. So I thought let's take out the color, the red and the blue of the concert. And then the film, like all black-and-white films, became more coherent.

The opera sequence with her teacher, who is challenging her, has so much detail. We see all the nuances of her face in black-and-white.

I'm Offenbach's biggest fan now. It was a miracle. I don't know how this kind of thing happens. I think Offenbach works perfectly with the pop songs. There's a continuity. And then Jeanne told me that this opera is the source for a film I love, a film everybody loves, *The Golden Coach* by Jean

Renoir, with Anna Magnani. A magnificent film in color. It reassured me about using black-and-white so that I wouldn't be repeating *The Golden Coach* in color.

There is always a thread of documentary in your fiction films. But with *Ne change rien* it's a documentary that feels as if it could be a kind of fiction. I wonder if the question of documentary or fiction is something you think about during the course of your work.

No. There are so many people thinking about that issue. It's difficult. For me, I feel it immediately if I go beyond a certain border. If I lose touch with some sort of reality, it's no good for me. I go back. I'm afraid. I don't know what to think. This film was a bit easier because the power of music is enormous, so I knew I could romanticize it a little bit and there was no danger. Now, seeing the film with Jeanne, we had the same impression: if there's fiction in this film, it's like a small B-picture, a Nick Ray movie, or, you know, three guys lost in a forest and they find some shack. They're drinking the coffee and there's a fire. They're a bit captive in this place and then they find a guitar and play.

I think *Ne change rien* is about the pursuit of perfection through creative expression. There's all this time spent watching rehearsals and following the attempts to do everything just right, over and over again. And the film is itself so precisely focused on the visual details. Is perfection something that you strive for?

I'm not sure about perfection. I tend to be very, very meticulous and do the best work I can and do it all within a certain tradition. You can call me reactionary or something, but it's the only way I see that is for me. If I go back, I can go forward. And going back for me is comparing, it's remembering, replacing, recalling. There are a lot of great things that I just can't forget or ignore. What I was trying to do was a good, interesting thing about music. It's like what I did with *In Vanda's Room*. That was not supposed to be a documentary about this junkie or this neighborhood, it was supposed to be the best "room movie" in the world! This is a fiction, paranoia, obsession, but it makes you think, it makes you act or react. So it's not really perfection. It's about the work—shooting, the angles, the positions. I was trying to get closer to a lot of things I like. Trying to create something with the people you are filming with. And constructing the best object you can.

JAMES HANSEN is founding editor of *Out 1 Film Journal*.

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HOTEL COLORADO

The 36th Telluride Film Festival ran during Labor Day weekend, September 4–7, 2009, and included a familiar mixture of new films, restorations, and selections by this year's guest director, Alexander Payne. Telluride is unique in many respects—and also paradoxical in some. A "boutique" festival held since 1973 in a picturesque town in the Colorado mountains, it does not announce its program in advance, offers no free press passes, and excludes the usual razzamatazz of red carpets, industry deal-making, and even premieres (while films sometimes have their first North American screening here, these showings have the status of unofficial "previews"). Accordingly, you are unlikely to see haute couture on display in Telluride, a town where the nevertheless wealthy residents (even tiny houses go for $2 million) prefer to wear fleeces and hiking gear. Outside the Sheridan Opera House, the original festival home (now one of nine screening venues, including the local high school), I heard Andrey Khrzhanovsky—whose wonderful debut feature, *Room and a Half*, screened this year—talking about an old acting exercise beloved of Stanislavsky. It involves observing people in the street and trying to discern from their way of moving, dress, and mannerisms, what "types" they are. "I have been doing this exercise," the award-winning animator told his audience, "and have come to conclusion that the town of Telluride is exclusively populated by kind, free people who love dogs." Regular attendees are devoted to the festival and the enthusiasm can even be a little disconcerting. When Gary Meyer, who, since taking over the reins from festival founders Bill and Stella Pence in 2007, now co-directs with Tom Luddy and Julie Huntsinger, introduced Serge Bromberg before the screening of his film, *Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno*, he mentioned that Bromberg was attending Telluride for the first time. "But we know it won't be his last," said Meyer. "Serge—welcome to the family!" The woman sitting next to me turned to me and said, "What is this, the Hotel California?"

If many people do indeed return to Telluride, in spite of the considerable difficulty in getting there, it is no doubt partly because the lack of pomp and pretension ensures that the festival's focus is on the films themselves, not on the business surrounding them. This year's program included already known quantities like Lone Scherfig's *An Education*, which won the audience award at Sundance, and Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet*, Grand Jury Prize-winner at Cannes, alongside films receiving their first public showing. This latter category included Margarethe von Trotta's *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* and Werner Herzog's *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done?*, a last-minute inclusion that the filmmaker himself carried to the festival direct from the editing suite. *My Son, My Son*, one of three offerings from Herzog—who, like Ken Burns, is something of a permanent fixture at Telluride—was produced by David Lynch, and, with its unnerving sense of something deeply wrong in the suburbs, does have a Lynchian flavor (though Herzog claims this was not his intention). Alongside these new films, Telluride always includes a program of "forgotten gems" selected by the guest director (in recent years, Slavoj Žižek, Don DeLillo, and Stephen Sondheim). One of Payne's selections, Inoue Umetsugu's *Daison no Kagemusha: The Third Shadow Warrior* (1963), had to be pieced together from film fragments, with one part projected from DVD, since no complete print is extant. Another highlight was a screening of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Argent* (1928), one of the most lavish and visually stunning works of cinema from the late silent era. It played to a packed house, with the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra performing its own score, written specially for the occasion.

One of the standout films at Telluride this year was, perhaps unsurprisingly, Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon*, winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes. This black-and-white film possesses, like Haneke's earlier collaborations with cinematographer Christian Berger, an awful, airless beauty. The plot involves mysterious, and increasingly violent, events that take place in a German village just before the outbreak of World War I. Haneke explained during an informal group discussion that he chose black-and-white because the emotional distance created by the lack of color undermines the illusion of direct access to "how it really was." This is also, Haneke said, why the narrator begins with a confession that he has trouble separating experience from hearsay in the account he is about to relate. The director, of course, remained steadfastly unforthcoming on the question of the "meaning" of his film. Asked whether or not he intended the film as an allegory or diagnosis of Europe's condition more broadly, he demurred, emphasizing the importance he places on his

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Telluride 2009

From top: festival photo by Lisa Law, courtesy of Telluride Film Festival. *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen*: © 2009 Clesart Film/Concorde Filmverleih. *The Road*: photo by Macall Polay, © 2008 2929/Dimension Films.

work being open to different interpretations. That openness is responsible for the force of Haneke's films, and part of the horror one experiences watching *The White Ribbon* is indeed the horror of realizing that one has no way of knowing exactly what is going on, or what it means. Ways of not knowing: that's also what the film is about.

With Haneke and Herzog participating in public discussions, German-born directors played a prominent role at Telluride this year. Margarethe von Trotta, stalwart and veteran of the New German Cinema, received one of Telluride's special tributes, and previewed her new film *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen*, which stars a characteristically captivating Barbara Sukowa—first known to many of us as Mieze in Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) and as the eponymous heroine in *Lola* (1981), or else from her previous work with von Trotta, notably in *Marianne and Julianne* (1981) and *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986)—in the role of the by turns beleaguered and celebrated twelfth-century Benedictine nun. The film continues in the tradition of von Trotta's portraits of strong women who become catalysts for political upheaval, albeit here departing her usual twentieth-century focus for the sights and the sounds (Sukowa performs a number of Hildegard's own compositions) of the Middle Ages. If *Vision*'s remarkably sensuous view of cloistered life does not always succeed dramatically, it is nevertheless striking in its portrayal of Hildegard as a deeply ambitious woman who managed, whether through political manipulation or genuine inspiration (the film shows little interest in psychological interpretation), to reach a position that broke the medieval version of the "glass ceiling." Speaking of glass ceilings: von Trotta noted her ambivalence about being only the second German woman director (and one of only a handful of woman directors from any nation) to have received a tribute at Telluride—especially since Leni Riefenstahl was first. (The Riefenstahl tribute, in 1973, was controversial enough to bring the festival to immediate prominence in its inaugural year.)

Another Telluride tribute was paid to actor Viggo Mortensen, who was in town with John Hillcoat's *The Road*, in which he stars. A faithful adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel about the world after the Apocalypse, the film showcases Mortensen to great effect as the nameless father who strives to protect his young son (Australian actor Kodi Smit-McPhee) amid the grey and burnt-out remnants of civilization. The film presents a Hobbesian vision of human savagery in the absence of social and legal institutions to keep brutality in check. To the extent that the film is emotionally powerful, it is due to the way it privileges the nuclear family unit as lost object. The tragedy of this incinerated world is that there is no place in it for the wife and mother (Charlize Theron). In early flashback sequences, she abandons the family in despair, to die "somewhere in the dark," as the father's voice-over says. From that moment, she functions as the missing

Analog idealization
Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno. Photo: Lobster. Courtesy of MK2.

sign that separates desperate father and son's struggle to survive in this world from the color and life of the one that appears, in the father's dying dreams, as a series of sun-drenched vignettes showing husband and wife in love at a happier time. The boy's rescue at the end ensures he is reclaimed by a surrogate family unit. We see society in the form of various ragged bands of cannibal predators in *The Road*, but the heterosexual nuclear family remains the film's only imaginable model of benign sociability.

Hillcoat's adaptation sentimentalizes the father–son relationship at the price of reducing femininity to a mere structural function, the mythical idealization of what has been lost. A film that takes such idealization as its theme, and offers up an astonishing formal treatment of it, is Henri-Georges Clouzot's unfinished 1964 work *Inferno*, in which Romy Schneider plays the ever-elusive object of desire. That film is the subject of Serge Bromberg and Ruxandra Medrea's documentary/reconstruction, *Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno*. (In 1994, Claude Chabrol used Clouzot's script—the story of an obsessive husband's descent into madness as he becomes increasingly convinced his beautiful young wife is cheating on him—as the basis of his own film of the same title.) With a huge budget from Columbia Pictures at his disposal, Clouzot put a team of France's best technicians and designers to work in pursuit of a visual style that would perfectly represent paralyzing obsession. Perpetually unsatisfied with the results, he nevertheless succeeded in creating a remarkable array of analog effects. As Clouzot fruitlessly labored to realize a vision whose contours he could never manage to adequately imagine, he remained burdened by a sense of his own irrelevance in the wake of the French New Wave, a movement whose formal innovations made his meticulous method of storytelling seem antiquated.

In the story as Bromberg and Medrea tell it, an obsessive Clouzot drove his cast and crew into their own "inferno," until his male lead Serge Reggiani walked off set, and Clouzot himself suffered a heart attack. This partial reconstruction of the film, from 185 cans of film discovered in the possession of Clouzot's widow, is the closest we will get to the work Clouzot hoped would be his masterpiece. The film received a repeat screening on the last day (the program for that day is not decided until the night before, so the programmers can respond to the prevailing mood of the festival). As a new work that is at the same time an old work that may otherwise be lost to history, *Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno* epitomizes the spirit of Telluride.

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THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX

After serving a twenty-two-year sentence, Bernd (Ulrich Noethen)—a former member of the Red Army Faction's second generation—is freed. His attorney whisks him off to his new apartment. Next door, Valerie (Franziska Petri) awaits. When she was eight, her father was killed by the RAF in a botched kidnapping attempt and now she wants to know who fired the shot that killed him. Thus begins *Long Shadows* (*Schattenwelt*, 2008), a film directed by Connie Walter and released in Germany in 2009. It joins Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex* in a revival of cinematic interest in the RAF, though *Long Shadows* is unusual in focusing on the children of the group's victims. The only other film that explores this topic is Andres Veiel's documentary *Black Box BRD* (2000); Christian Petzold's *The State I Am In* (2000) and Margarethe von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane* (1981) consider the next generation, too, using family dramas to articulate political history, but they focus on the children of the terrorists.

The RAF's decades-long campaign of armed struggle began with its formation in 1970, lasted up to its disbandment in 1998, and included assassinations, kidnappings, bombings, and the unprecedented severity in post-World War II democratic West Germany of the state's response. Filmmakers associated with New German Cinema were quick to discuss the events. Three notable films dwell on questions of biased media representation: Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum* (1975), based on the novel by Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll; the collectively produced *Germany in Autumn* (1978), part fiction, part documentary; and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Third Generation* (1979), a farce in the style of Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967). Schlöndorff returned to the subject matter in 2000 with *The Legend of Rita*, loosely based on the life of Inge Viett, founder member of the anarchist June 2 Movement, which had links to the RAF. (Viett is also discussed in Kristina Konrad's 2001 *Greater Freedom, Lesser Freedom*, which takes a comparative, transnational approach by presenting Maria Barhoum, member of the Tupamaros Uruguay.)

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The all-star, €20 million *Baader Meinhof Complex* adapts Stefan Aust's 1985 book about the 1967–77 period. (Aust, whose book is a standard text, edited *Konkret*, the left-wing journal founded by Ulrike Meinhof's husband, Klaus Rainer Röhl.) The film sparked considerable debate after its release in Germany, dividing critics. For example, *Spiegel* claimed that the docudrama was "event cinema without impetus . . . behind the action and the film's finesse hides a history lesson that lacks a clear position" (September 18, 2008), while another review praised the film's open-endedness: it "dared to represent events in a style that was neither cramped nor moralizing" (*Die Tageszeitung*, September 20). Ironically, given that the film meticulously re-creates the era, reconstructing its colors, clothes, hair styles, and interiors, and borrowing police cars from a museum, another critic felt that the detail overwhelmed any analysis: "For all the action, attacks and assassinations, there is barely any time to breath, because all the slogans and rallying cries that one knew from the era had to be tallied up, all the images recreated" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* September 24), indicative of a "decision to show but not to interpret" (*Spiegel*, September 18).

While the filmmakers stated that they would preserve the honor of the RAF's victims, some surviving family members were not so convinced. The wife of Jürgen Ponto, for example, fought to have the scene of her husband's murder removed from the film, arguing that it did not accurately reflect the murder. Furthermore, Ponto's daughter argued that using the murder to market the thriller—a scene repeatedly aired on television in the weeks prior to the film's release—was deeply disturbing to her and her family and damaged the honor of her father. A court eventually decided that on the basis of constitutional rights granting freedom of (artistic) expression the scene could remain in the film.

During its 150 minutes, the film achieves action-film momentum—bombs exploding, bullets spraying, and glass shattering—and this inevitably comes at the expense of quasi-journalistic exposé or historical excavation. Producer Bernd Eichinger, however, defends the film's approach in press notes for the film: "there are no heroes in this film, no one the audience can identify with. There's also no plot in the strictest sense, no linear narrative. Instead, it's solely the monstrosity of events, which grabs the attention of the audience and which keeps the story moving forward." Eichinger calls it

The death of Benno Ohnesorg, Rudi Dutschke

The Baader Meinhof Complex. © 2008 Constantin Film Produktion GMBH, Nouvelles Éditions de Film S.A., G.T. Film Production S.R.O. DVD: Momentum Pictures (U.K.).

"shredded dramaturgy"—"the film consists of puzzle pieces, which the audience has to piece together themselves in order to get the overall picture." The makers intended to create a film that asked "questions without providing any answers. This was neither going to be a didactic film nor a modern morality play about German terrorism." In this sense, the film is—in Eichinger's estimation—"complex."

The Baader Meinhof Complex draws on various techniques to construct its blend of history and drama. It relies heavily on the use of handheld camera; tracking shots are rare. For example, the opening dramatization of the June 2, 1967 demonstration against the Shah of Iran's visit to Berlin, as Edel explains in the DVD commentary, "is not staged facing one particular camera, rather the camera tries to catch as much of the action as possible like in a documentary." Four handheld cameras were used. Additionally, Edel typically shoots at eye level, not from above, so there is no overview. To add to the film's realism, natural lighting is used wherever possible.

Frequently, the film restages events based on and referencing photos from mass media, which are iconic in Germany. When—as part of the June 2 demonstrations—a student is shown lying dead on the ground with a Volkswagen parked directly behind and a woman cradling his head, most German viewers know it is Benno Ohnesorg who has been shot. The film does not need to provide his name. Likewise, when Andreas Baader (Moritz Bleibtreu) and Holger Meins (Stiper Erceg) are shown heading into a garage lot encircled by stark white apartment complexes, German audiences know their arrest will soon ensue because photographs of the scene have been widely reproduced. The film calls attention to its photographic references early on: while Rudi Dutschke (Sebastian Blomberg) gives a speech, the film freezes, capturing a shot of him, switches into black-and-white, then back into color, and then resumes action. Edel comments in the introduction to the film on the DVD: "There are so many images from this time that have imprinted themselves on the collective memory. Now, one sees a film . . . and suddenly one sees a picture that one recognizes. Suddenly, one has the feeling that the film delivers the images between the images that one already knows. It fills what one already has in one's head with content, with connections." In addition to restaging familiar photos, *The Baader Meinhof Complex* includes clips from the era's news reports, showing the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King's assassination, Russian tanks in Prague, and May '68 in Paris.

Edel and Eichinger met at the Munich Film Academy in 1970. It was an era they experienced. They shared an understanding of the events and agreed on how to represent them in *The Baader Meinhof Complex*. According to Edel, they also shared an interest in bringing the history books to life: "I'm not an historian but a filmmaker. For me, it was important that—I have two sons, who are nineteen and twenty years old—that I could tell them this history, and as I think it took place, since I belong to the generation that experienced it."

CHRISTINA GERHARDT is a visiting scholar at Columbia University, finishing her book *Critique of Violence: The Trauma of Terrorism*, which examines representations of the Red Army Faction in literature, art, and film.

DVD DATA *The Baader Meinhof Complex*. Director: Uli Edel. © 2008 Constantin Film Produktion GMBH, Nouvelles Éditions de Film S.A., G.T. Film Production S.R.O. Publisher: Constantin Film (Germany). €15.95, 2 discs.

CATCALLING

It's four decades now since those pretzel-logic days of possibility, transformation, rage, confusion, and defeat—and increasingly as they're returned to us, it's in the form that documentary currently prefers to dab at history: the immense flow of available news footage intercut with middle-aged talking heads placing themselves in careful safe accord with what all speaking take to be the story. Even *The Weather Underground*, with its participants at such unresolved extremes, its bombs and inner flight—angry American youth bringing the Vietnam War home—fashions a stolid, meager consensus from its elements. It's not the only way. Chris Marker's *Le Fond de l'air est rouge*—in English *A Grin Without a Cat*—is a vast study of the emergence and failure of the 1960s Left, woven out of his own and other footage, and woven into a meditation on a longer tale of the radical Left everywhere. A three-hour film covering ten years of world history, 1967–77, it evokes some seventy-five years, from *The Battleship Potemkin* to the coda Marker added in the early 1990s.

A quarter of the way into *A Grin Without a Cat* comes an extended, seemingly blunt announcement of something new under the sun: "1967 saw the arrival of a peculiar breed of adolescents. They all looked alike. They would immediately recognize each other. They seemed to possess a silent and absolute knowledge of certain issues, but to be totally ignorant about others. Their hands were unbelievably skillful at pasting up posters, handling paving stones, spraying short and cryptic messages which stuck in the memory. All the while calling for more hands to pass on the message they'd received but not completely deciphered. Those fragile hands have left us the mark of their fragility. Once they even wrote it on a banner: *workers will take the flag of struggle from the fragile hands of the students*. But that was the following year."

A space, the film has been saying, had opened, between old and new Left; as the red Elvis of the Third World, Che Guevara was its face. With the anticlimactic Bolivian debacle of Che's guerrilla Marxism, the non-delivery of its threatened "two, three, many Vietnams," was it really, we're asked, just western imperialism that was relieved at his squalid death? Marker shows a distraught Castro, for once (nearly) speechless, as well as lesser communist commentators, aghast at Che's adventurism. All tiptoe opportunistically round his bare-chested mass appeal. And then, at some rock festival, the "peculiar adolescents," blithely wrapped in the image of their martyred knight—this paradoxical icon of a liberation from the unfreedoms of their own lives, to be sure, but also from the grim puritan bureaucracies and brutal dreary prison realms of the actually existing socialism they blankly decline to serve: at once a warrior for and against the failed left-wing gerontocracies. But the camera doesn't dwell on them. The announcement occurs across a montage of innumerable hands, feeding or writing or warring, as if to say: when watching for the future, you may not yet be seeing what you should be looking at. If the narration give us Marker's thoughts, they always emerge in the voices of others: as we gaze and listen, the words and images seem to stand away from one another a little. And this youthful space—the word *adolescents* far more the point than *students*—between unbridgeably confronting orders is perhaps an illusion, perhaps even a sly police provocation, but it opens onto another that's neither, the space between crowds and power.

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In 1969, the U.S. New Left—known to itself as just "the Movement"—shattered. The radical journalist Andrew Kopkind was at the Chicago convention of its key mass organization, Students for a Democratic Society, and recorded the speech made by movement leader Bernadine Dohrn, soon to be the pop-star face on the FBI's most-wanted posters: "'We are not a caucus,' she said at the end. 'We are SDS.' And suddenly it became true to the crowds in the bleachers, and they knew that there was no turning back." Captivated by her eloquence, Kopkind heard a clarion call here, where we, today, may only hear the dreary sectarian routine of far-left politics: after a staged walkout, the Progressive Labor faction was expelled from SDS. Dohrn, for the hostile majority, was denouncing the self-trapped dogma of the old-school revolutionary Left as much as the compromised pragmatism of the center. Kopkind also—almost inadvertently—captured something else, the sheer absoluteness of identification and purpose: "We are SDS." Forty years ago, those three letters meant so much: today, to anyone under forty, they mean nothing at all. *No turning back*: the speed of the change, everything to nothing in a matter of months, as if her words were the wrong kind of spell. Alice, Dohrn herself, vanishes underground; the insurrection of a million minds—the student Left—begins its long fade back to invisibility.

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It's because Marker's films are uncluttered with all the hurriedly enforcing signals others reach for—too-tight unities of sight and sound as anxious confirmations *how* to see, *how* to read, *how* to hear—that they, too, can show such easy-to-miss moments, in such profusion: as one of his actors voices Marker's ethic somewhere, "You can never know what you're filming." Moments such as Tati Allende, Salvador's daughter, standing up in his revolutionary honor before a vast Havana gathering, in the wake of Chile's and democracy's lethal fall to Pinochet. She steps aside as Castro begins to speak; the camera stays on her expressionless, exhausted face. As a barely discernible tear tracks her cheek, the narrator tells us that she, like her father before her, will commit suicide; and the detail expands into the gulf between her hopes and her dread.

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Che is everywhere in "Fragile Hands," the first half of *A Grin Without a Cat* (and everywhere agonizingly absent from the second). Two other cats, twinned antipodes to this topsy-turvy decade, are never quite visible, except perhaps as a trace in the moves or acts of those on-screen.

Writing in the late 1960s—about Janis Joplin, *Easy Rider*, Woodstock, the Who, the Movement—the great early rock critic and radical feminist Ellen Willis noted, again and again, the entangled contradictory forces at work, of self-rescue through stardom, of the establishment of a mass youth manifestation of a bohemian cultural rebellion: "Dylan's appreciation of surface detail represents Guthrie-esque common sense—to Dylan, a television commercial was always a television commercial as well as a symbol of alienation." As a careful far-leftie, Willis every time insists that a cultural revolution (a true change in the role of art) can only follow a social revolution, an actual upheaval in the social order; yet as a fan, she's caught, fascinated, in these swift glimpses of something else maybe there, gliding away around a corner. Dylan is her touchstone, his beatnik self-absorption and slippery sexy arrogance exactly the "alike" that Marker's adolescents looked; watch Régis Debray or Daniel Cohn-Bendit lounge and swagger in *A Grin Without a Cat*, or Dohrn's partner Bill Ayers, a self-loving young stud, in *The Weather Underground*. The on-camera pose is the maddening core of the "absolute knowledge" they may seem to have. (Hard perhaps now to recall how potent was the superbly insouciant way the Beatles and Dylan had with television's self-serious absurdity.)

Bill Ayers
The Weather Underground. © 2004 The Free History Project.
DVD: New Video Group.

Dylan's twin, of course—secret adept of banners, spray-paint, the paving stones of Paris, legislator of the May '68 revolt, tellingly unacknowledged by Marker—is Guy Debord, as resolutely clandestine as his other half was everywhere. No doubt it's daft today to insist that you'll best understand Guy if only you study Bob, with both so hopelessly buried in the rubble pile of the misconceptions of their hagiographers. Self-fashioned bohemians both, hypnotized yet disgusted by modern media, both—for a short dizzying while—were its wilful masters: it's no accident that "Weatherman," as the group first termed itself, fannishly swiped a memorable, cryptic Dylan phrase for its manifesto. Both endlessly dodge through ways to trick or dare you into re-seeing your own lives, your own agency, before pop or vanguard art or spectacular politics infected either. Debord's abdication from and dissolution of the Situationist International in the early 1970s can be read through the scrim of his own riddling quasi-Marxist explanations, wrong-footing the reserve army of self-appointed successors to his own unwanted celebrity: his 1989 memoir *Panegryic* gnomically recasts two decades of engaged avant-gardism as a tale of beer, pretty girls, and war-nerd reading matter. A whole chapter is given over to showing—though never directly saying—that the Situationist term of art, *dérive*, translates most accurately, if unglamorously, as "pub crawl": one last turn of self-revelation as, yes, Dylanesque mystification.

⁂

There's a startling edit late in *Woodstock*, another 1969 vanishing that cuts against the self-celebratory timbre of both festival and documentation. The romance of American pop was always the dance between the lonely spotlit face and the watching thousands; the movie's true subject is the gathered skinny-dipping mass, watching themselves as they take history's stage, and throughout the camera has switched from audience POV to star's-eye-view back into the crowd. Now, during Hendrix's set, we gaze at an empty hillside, a suddenly desolate aftermath. Contrast a scene near the beginning of Marker's film: an unpeopled flight of steps suddenly filled with a crowd, fading in from who knows where. Of course

Faces, hands, power, and crowds: the seen and the unseen

A Grin Without a Cat. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. DVD: Icarus Films.

this is an image from *Battleship Potemkin*, which the narrator—Marker's memory, actor's voice—tells us, in the film's very first words, "I did not see . . ."

This perhaps is what sets Marker apart from Dylan and Debord; from the no-turning-back surge of the social moment he's remembering; perhaps from all the extant Marxist tradition he's too easily tidied into. At once daunting and transparent, his ellipsis is never riddling; his montage never has the hipster's impatience with its own dullard followers; this is not the romance of the beleaguered "higher man" against all the straight world, but rather a romance with the crowd itself, a romance with its endless mass of detail and possibility; its flow, its stance, its likeness to you . . . Dylan and Debord both use confident vanity as a put-on, playing hard and fast with the wily teacherly possibilities of boho stardom, but they hardly overthrew it, or we wouldn't be stuck with all the hagiography. Trapped in their own mirror stage, narcissistically saint-struck, the faces of the New Left plunged into incomprehensible internecine squabble about which among them was emerging the most perfectly formed exemplar of how to be after the revolution. And—this is where Marker's part two, titled "Severed Hands," glumly takes us—above all this, the grown-ups stepped back onto the catafalque with soon-to-be-dead Warhol pin-up Mao to once more take charge. The Cultural Revolution was anyway already here, insisted one clever little gang of French power-toadies, as they brandished the works of the Great (blood-drenched) Helmsman: though on-screen, this perhaps sneaks past us almost unnoticed, in a broader stream of reversals. Only in his 2008 DVD notes will Marker lets us glimpse his full anger at such idiocy: "French Maoism would remain a landmark in the history of teratology." Former gadfly Castro took his place up there with the Moscow bureaucrats. Forget Jan Palach, ignore Prague. "Can the socialist camp allow . . .?"

In 1971 in Persepolis, at an arts pageant in which the Shah celebrated 2500 years of tyranny, all the wizened stars of higher state purpose gathered to gladhand and congratulate: capitalist, communist, nonaligned. Nixon could be toppled; no need even for the Movement; single-issue stage invasions—like the Japanese consumer revolt at the Minimata pollution scandal—would still erupt. But it's certain now that the Cheshire Cat had once more slipped away.

⁂

So what *is* the cat and where—strangest question—shall we find its grin? In *Alice in Wonderland*, of course, the two mock royalty and teach a child to topple the court. Unbiddable in their arrivals and leave-taking, they are uncanny in their partial lingerings, their different and distinct hard-to-grasp not-yet-there-nesses. At odds with one another, they sit somehow outside official time: and time—and memory—bring us back to the heart of Marker's life's work, and how deeply it matters to him that we know—see, read, hear, feel—the space between how it was, how he wishes it had been been, how it could be. Tempting simply to say that the cat is revolution and the grin the generational dialectic, this turn of human time which presages change but also mocks it. Faced with the unanswerable indictment the young always bring—simply by arriving in the world their elders failed to redeem—the old guard's distrust of and resistance to it will be fashioned from the forms, habits, and institutions it surrounded itself with in the days after its own rebellious adventures long ago, when change arrived or seemed to, or failed to.

But of course the grin is everything we see and don't see, everything we don't take in but should. Not just voices but faces; not just faces, but hands. Students grow up to be teachers themselves, participants in May '68, yes, or onlookers, and in time, in weariness or in anguish glossing the turmoil—its voluble energy, its guilelessness, its openness—as its opposite; the urgent triage of the moment denounced as a hindsight-obvious trap. To protect their children from heartbreak or worse; to protect their careers, their own compensation for their own despair. *Won't get fooled again*: Debord's theory of the spectacle recast, by ten thousand tenured pseudo-radicals, as a blindness—no cat here—and no grin either. Everything tricks of the mind and the media.

No wonder Marker uses voice as he does: as far as possible from the skeins of bad authority and justificatory citation which infest our age. As *The Weather Underground* re-shows and re-tells it, the vanguard fellowship appeared merely to have stepped through the glass at some point, into a parallel, wholly unpeopled America. But student stars-to-be aren't all we see on Marker's cameras; and nor is Castro, nor even Che. There, in the center of all those crowds: all those other faces; all those deft, unnamed hands. Workers, peasants, the people beyond the imperial metropole. There for a moment, then gone: the momentary detail—and not always grinning—all of it, this flow, this mighty flood. Stars are made of the crowds that surge through them. What if every last rescued detail stepped up to speak, from the center of the screen, and from its margins too: every single unglamorous cat? Millions and millions and millions of cats. *You can never know what you're filming.*

MARK SINKER is a *Sight and Sound* contributing editor.

DVD DATA *A Grin Without A Cat.* Director: Chris Marker. © 1977 ISKRA-Ina-Dovidis. Publisher: Icarus Films. $29.98, 1 disc.

The Weather Underground. Director: Sam Green. © 2004 The Free History Project. Publisher: New Video Group. $24.95, 1 disc.

LE PLAISIR: "LA MAISON TELLIER"

Set by Guy de Maupassant in Fécamp, "La Maison Tellier" is the tale of a brothel, its clients, and its workers. This middle episode of Max Ophuls's *Le Plaisir* is longer and more fully dramatized than the two sketches that come before and after. No doubt the story appealed to Ophuls (and even more to producers impressed by the international career of his carnival of copulation, *La Ronde*) because it promised a space of laughter and bawdry between two somber anecdotes.

Maupassant supplied a witty collision between institutions serving bodily and religious appetites—between pleasure and purity, as the film's narrator puts it—by taking the prostitutes on a weekend trip to a Normandy village to go to church and witness the first communion of the madam's little niece. Perhaps most attractive was the tale's clear and eloquent three-part structure, with the narrative moving from town to country and back again. It allowed Ophuls to place a central triptych within the triptych of *Le Plaisir*.

With his co-writer Jacques Natanson, Ophuls honored Maupassant by holding to the shape of the story and its key events, retaining also many of its minor incidents and allowing us to savor passages of the descriptive prose in the voice-over narration. Of dialogue there was little, and since most of the events were related in general terms the author had supplied few of the specific words, gestures, and images that a performing version demands. The filmmakers had a need—which was also a space—to fill out the detail and bring their own inventions to the drama.

In *Le Plaisir* "La Maison Tellier" becomes both a largely faithful translation of the original and a radical transformation of it. The difference is above all one of tone and viewpoint. Wry humor, and a few belly laughs, are found in both places. But it is as unlikely that a reader was ever moved to tears by the story as it is difficult to imagine any audience being unmoved by the film. Where Maupassant is hard and sarcastic, glad to shock, Ophuls is tactful and humane, his irony deepened by subtlety.

No director has a finer appreciation than Ophuls of the difference between visibility and display. "La Maison Tellier" shows how film, which offers so many ways of bringing a sight or sound to our particular attention, offers as a result tuneable scales from the starkly emphasized to the passingly present. On-screen, since nothing is insignificant, details can work like background sound, informing our vision without demanding to be noticed or read or remembered. Everything we see stands as well in a relationship with what it implies. In film after film Ophuls experimented with the play between what is put before our eyes and ears and what remains out of sight or unheard. Most boldly, he worked with the narrated image so as to find a new power of suggestion in the harmonies and tensions between the spoken and the seen.

As the Tellier house is first presented the film's Voice of Maupassant is almost garrulous in describing its layout and customs; it introduces the personnel one by one, and goes into some detail about Madame Tellier's role, history, and status. But this effusiveness offsets a reticence in other areas, so that the unspoken becomes as telling as what's declared. No reference is made to the primary purpose of the establishment, and the plain words "brothel" and "prostitute" are never pronounced.

Ophuls's camera takes its cue from silences whose discretion hints at a context in social hypocrisy. The image is restricted to the glimpses of the action within the house that it can obtain as it roves across the outside walls and windows. We catch no gestures or spaces with an evidently erotic purpose, and no character is seen at a before or after moment. Leaving explanation to the storyteller, Ophuls counts on our awareness of the basics of the sex trade while he renders the Tellier house with a pervasive air of fellowship and innocence. He creates a tone appropriate to the "fairy tale for grown-ups" that the narrator has promised, but also pictures the incompleteness of our view: the walls, shutters, and blinds that veil the image are continuously before us whereas we have only intermittent access to the rooms beyond. The camera's impressive mobility lets us see and feel, even if we do not tell ourselves, that we have been both held off and protected from an available insight.

This exposition is offered in a passage marked as a prologue and as it ends Madame Tellier (Madeleine Renaud) is one of two characters who have been brought to prominence. The other is the prostitute Rosa (Danielle Darrieux). But whereas the narrator was free with his account of the madam's situation and attitudes, he has fallen into silence since Rosa appeared. We learn nothing of her past and what we gather of her inner self we derive entirely from the way she looks, sounds, acts, and is seen. No comment is made, for in-

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A tale of two houses

Le Plaisir. © 1952 Gaumont-Stera Films. DVD: Criterion Collection.

stance, about the gestures which complete the prologue. Rosa escorts her client to the bordello's front door where payment is made and received as a matter of course, without embarrassment. The man is on his way out when Rosa calls him back, using nothing more familiar than his surname. "Monsieur Dupuis," she says, "don't take cold," and she reaches to pull a scarf from his pocket and tie it round his neck, saying a fond "there, now" as she releases him. Their smiles suggest that they recognize the motherliness of the gesture and that they conspire to leave its ironies unprobed.

Rosa's character is developed, and made to matter to us, through passing moments like these where we sense depths ignored by her world and largely by herself. Not one of them will be observed or defined by a narrator who addresses only general and shared circumstance, never the movements of an individual consciousness. The tale began as an account of the brothel's everyday social and economic function but it evolves, with the move to the countryside, to chart the women's experience of a rare departure from routine and of an encounter that could, but does not, transform their lives. While never shedding her identity with the group, Rosa is the woman brought to the center as the one most gravely stirred by the sight of a different world.

There are two key moments. In each of them a vital role is played by Joseph Rivet (Jean Gabin). He is Julia Tellier's brother, a carpenter, and it is his only child whose first communion is the occasion for the break from Fécamp's routine. Rivet's relationship with the group is familial rather than erotic. He comes on the scene as a brother and a host, not with the identity of an actual or potential client. As contacts between Rosa and Rivet gather, Ophuls develops their relationship through a balance between invention and restraint: invention in bringing forward brief exchanges whose warmth goes beyond that displayed between Joseph and any other of the Tellier women; restraint in having these moments occur across public space, involving neither touch nor any signal of appetite. What is not done, or is unshown, colors our understanding. We comprehend, without observing, that Rosa never calls Rivet by name. When Joseph bids his guest goodnight after directing her toward her bedroom, it is with no thought that he might follow her there. He smiles as he heads off alone in the opposite direction, happy with just that degree of contact. The film bars a too readily available reaction, that this is a missed opportunity.

That then is the background against which we witness Rivet's involvement in the crisis that overtakes Rosa in church on the following day. During the service she breaks down in tears. Her emotions infect her fellows and spread through the whole congregation.

The power of the scene depends upon playing reticence against profusion and density of detail. The approach to the church and the negotiation of seating arrangements within are delightfully charted. But all the fuss subsides, and detailed depiction ceases once the little communicants have paraded down the aisle. While the pacing becomes reverential, we are given no more than an impression of the service. None of the key moments in the ritual is set before us. No word, no sight, sound, or occasion is singled out as the cause of Rosa's tears.

Although he has plenty to say about the public aspects of the event, the storyteller is silent about Rosa. Where Maupassant's text is expansive about her thoughts and feelings, the film avoids the limiting clarity of what can be named. Where Maupassant put explanation, Ophuls puts music. Strings take over from the choir with the sacred strains of Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* but this harmony comes from nowhere within the space of the church. The music is vital to the feeling of the scene. It offers an emotional understanding but, wordless, it deepens the mystery of the events.

As the contagion spreads there are people weeping all round and on either side of him, but Rivet singles out Rosa for an attempt at comfort, as if he senses a sorrow uniquely deep. That choice, and the need that drives it, are dramatized by his having to fumble along the pew as quietly as he can manage, changing places to sit next to Rosa and whisper unavailingly that she should not be crying. His sympathy seems the more genuine and tender because it does not come in a context of flirtation or courtship.

But what follows makes an odd and uncomfortable connection between protective compassion and brute desire. There is an ellipse to post-communion celebrations back at the Rivet house, where Joseph is effusive with drink. The moment of Rosa's passion is left completely behind. While the women are preparing themselves for departure, Rivet stumbles at speed towards Rosa's room and makes—behind its closed door—an advance of some kind. It is repelled by the women as a squad. Their rebukes tell us that the approach was more undignified than alarming; evidently it involved the removal of Joseph's waistcoat. Rosa is out of sight and the timing is such that we are not invited, while we laugh, to imagine her reaction. Once Joseph's wagon is on its way back toward the railway station the incident seems to have been forgotten.

We have almost forgotten it ourselves when the women interrupt the journey to spend a few minutes picking wildflowers in a laneside meadow. Mozart has been left behind long since. Scattered about the field, the women are in chorus with the popular song whose tune harks back to the life of the brothel and whose words put the delights of the body, and regret for their passing, in defiance of religious obligation.

The way of the world

Le Plaisir. © 1952 Gaumont-Stera Films. DVD: Criterion Collection.

In what follows, transforming the mood, the stillness of the camera is just as telling as its mobility elsewhere. Nearest, but held off from us by a foreground of greenery, are Rivet and Rosa. She is doing the same as her more distantly seen companions, gathering flowers and singing. Joseph is sitting to the right of her, only a couple of feet away. How this nearness came about, we were not shown. If Joseph sought it, Rosa is doing nothing to escape it. Adding to her collection of blooms, she bobs up and down, turns this way and that, but stays close to him. Joseph, a dark figure fixed low in the frame, is not hearing the song. His few movements are small and slow. He fiddles, with a straw, with his hat, with a flower, and darts glances at Rosa while her eyes are turned away. When at last speech comes to him—gentle, hesitant—its tone freezes Rosa's movement and her song, leaving her bowed as she grasps the seriousness of his mood.

Joseph finds the words to beg Rosa's pardon. Under an open sky, with the others in view though removed from earshot, he summons a confessional intimacy to seek an absolution that is Rosa's alone to grant. He wants her to know that only the drink made him forget himself back there. His posture speaks his mind: he is looking up to her, humbled. For us, his misdemeanor was a laughing matter, and Rosa has not acted as if anything unusual was involved. His apology pierces her, chokes her voice. She can manage only a nod to set him at ease. Then she turns away, whispering a single word. She thanks him.

MAX OPHULS ON *LE PLAISIR*

Dear Jean-Jacques Gautier,

I wanted to respond today to the questions you posed me about my film *Le Plaisir*. I shall not reply to them all as I always do part of my work not without reflecting upon it but instinctively. It's possible that in *Le Plaisir* I relied too much on my intuition. I am also a bit disconcerted because I like my film and the work of my collaborators, actors, and technicians. So:

Why these group shots? Why nothing but those? Why can the eye never come to rest on a close-up?

In "The Mask" and "The Model," it's because of the way that these stories take me. They agitate me, they bear down on me, and that's probably what makes the camera keep on the move so much of the time. On the other hand, in "La Maison Tellier," the lens goes off on holiday with the girls. The scenery, the church, the meetings and adventures, they only pass before them. This suite of movements can leave the impression that there are few close-ups, and yet these movements have been designed in such a way that the actors are often found close to the lens. It's just that the spectator takes less notice than if the close shots were arrived at through cutting. Anyway I'm not ready to concede that the close-up is obligatory. I attached great importance, for instance, to the ability to show the five girls *en famille*, "like a bouquet of flowers" (Maupassant). So I did not pick them out one by one by putting them in separate shots. Besides, I think that very often actors express themselves better with their whole bodies. Gabin could entrance us from a mile away.

Why the narration?

Because my intention was not to write scenes but to illustrate Maupassant's stories. Maupassant wrote very little dialogue and the voice comes back often because I did not want to lose the beauty of the descriptive prose and because what the image could express by itself seemed insufficient to me. If as a result there is often an effect of doubling, it is because I wanted it that way.

Why this musical-comedy world that seems so ill-matched to a style in which Maupassant foreshadowed the solidity of cinema, even its realism?

It seems that these stories do not strike me so much as realist. I had no thought of moving towards operetta. The landscapes were photographed naturally. I had thought that the sadness surrounding these women could be rendered more poignant by having them pass through this happy, sunny countryside that would be theirs for only twenty-four hours; and then I showed them, with intentional monotony, as at the start, through windows and shutters, prisoners of their lot. Writing this I realize that I need much more space than I'd expected because your questions touch on the fundamentals of the film and on the general problems of adaptation to cinema. One last reply:

Why this impression of slowness?

Because you do not like the film, dear Gautier, and the "fair play" [in English in the original] with which you invited this letter does not change that at all. Unfortunately.

Max Ophüls

Published in *Le Figaro*, March 11, 1952. Reprinted in Georges Annenkov, *Max Ophüls* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1962), pp. 55–6. Translated by V. F. Perkins.

Gratitude lies far outside anything Joseph looked for. But we have no time to work through the meanings of Rosa's response. We have just felt the depth of it when Rosa's moment—one that needed to be dwelt upon—is swept away. The real world breaks in, the world whose urgencies leave little room for what is important. Madame Tellier recalls everyone to roles, routines, and commerce. More than ever the schoolmarm, she rushes the whole flock back to the cart so as not to risk missing the afternoon train. The break is enforced by a cut from the whispering stillness of Rivet and Rosa to a panning shot that shares the shrill momentum of Julia's stride down the hillside. What goes unmarked, here as elsewhere, is Rosa's reentering the group. When next seen she is simply one of the half-dozen women who make up a cartful.

Rosa's encounters—with Joseph, with solitude, with her god, with herself—stir feelings that ought surely to have consequence in the world. They should change something. But Rosa like everyone else will catch the 3.55, leaving behind the countryside, the church, and Rivet. No other possibility is so much as glimpsed. When Joseph singles her out for a special farewell, any chance that they may meet again depends upon his making a visit to the brothel and finding her back at work there.

The episode of the Tellier women's country visit ends here, but not with the women. The finale of what has become Rosa's tale is played on Joseph Rivet. In the imagery of departure Ophuls lets us know how strong a feeling can be that brings no alteration to the course of people's lives. The camera tracks Rivet as he runs through fields beside the train until he reaches a gap in the hedge where he may call a last *À bientôt, Madame Rosa*. He stares after the train as it gathers speed and disappears from view, until he is left waving his hat at just the last wisp of its white steam dissolving in the sunlight. The shot—a technician's nightmare and a viewer's wonder—continues to trace Rivet in his new solitude, walking off with just the slope of the terrain to propel his gait.

In a remarkable displacement all the emotion that has built up across Rosa's encounters is released in a long anticlimax, an extended treatment of Rivet's saddened journey back towards his daily life. No close-ups, no commentary, only a gentle panning shot, and a wistful reprise of Rosa's tune, as the horse and cart carry his sagging figure into the distance back along the tree-lined lane. Closing the country interlude, this passage answers the one at the start that brought the women all excited on the train from Fécamp; it stands in, then, for scenes of their return. Its mood is of loss, and regret for promise unfulfilled, though the days in the country, we knew, were just an excursion. There was never a likely future for Rosa and Rivet. Through the picture of these imagined lives, Ophuls grieves with us that the world is as it is.

The final sequence plunges us back into night and the town. Words come easily now. The film smiles indulgently, implicating itself in delight and deceit as the brothel's regulars celebrate the women's return. Champagne is ordered. Madame Tellier is swept up in the mood. She concedes a reduction in price, and orders flowers everywhere. In an image of abandon, the barman straddles above the front door and kicks it open for each new arrival. He is up there to place a floral wreath round the outside lantern whose brightness declares the resumption of normal services.

The story of the whorehouse and its role in society was promised to bring a mood of gaiety. It cannot find its end in melodrama or tragedy, not even in pathos. So a humming chorus on the soundtrack voices a rising excitement. A raucous crescendo in the music of the dance refuses all recognition to the bitterness of human potential wasted and ignored. Only an edge of frenzy in the celebration could worry us about what we know but are not seeing.

The more seductive the jollity of these images, the stronger the paradox of merriment as the endnote and the successor to Rivet's lonely moments. Coming back to the Tellier house we come back to the outside view, manifestly partial, incomplete. The formal repetition embraces the lack of change, and seals the mode of ironic euphemism that has prevailed ever since the storyteller promised us a fairy tale and introduced Madame Tellier's with elaborate reticence as an establishment to be named only as a house. Where Rivet's departure was marked with sorrow, the film enacts Rosa's fate by losing her from view. She is neither heard from nor mentioned, and she is glimpsed just enough to affirm that she is back at work—once more dancing, cigarette in mouth, with M. Dupuis. The clients and the madam carry all the prominent action. Rosa is simply there, not brought forward as she was at the start, not brought forward now like her companions or even the barman, and for all we can tell swept up as much as the others, and as much as we are in the "gale of naïve and careless joy" that blows through the company. It was generous of Ophuls, as well as brilliant, to wrap the sadness of this outcome in a scene of riot and revel. We are allowed, if we will, to mistake gaiety for happiness.

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DVD DATA Le Plaisir. Director: Max Ophuls. © 1952 Gaumont-Stera Films. Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2008. $39.95, 1 disc. (U.K. publisher: Second Sight, 2006. £19.99, 1 disc.)

SIX BOOKS ABOUT SCORSESE

DAVID STERRITT

Does anyone keep track of how many books are published each year about particular filmmakers? I'm against turning film appreciation into contests—box-office duels and Oscar races give me the willies—but looking at the expanding crop of books about Martin Scorsese's life and work, I can't help wondering how many have appeared so far, how many countries and languages they represent, and whether Scorsese might someday outstrip Alfred Hitchcock as the director of choice for critics and scholars. His body of work is less than half the size of Hitchcock's as of now, but his creativity and productivity are going strong, and so is the enterprise of chronicling and commenting on the Scorsese saga. Recent installments vary a great deal in thoughtfulness and readability, but their differences of tone, approach, and methodology are themselves a reminder of how artistically rich and critically inexhaustible the works of an authentic artist always are.

Scorsese's back story has been told so often that his admirers know it by heart. Many of its tellers have followed the same general lines, though, skimming over some issues while pounding incessantly on others. Hence the ubiquitous theory that Scorsese's visual aesthetics and world view were installed in his psyche by a handful of factors in his early years—the sickly childhood in Little Italy; the hours spent viewing movies with his father and watching neighborhood mobsters from his window; the fascination with sin, salvation, and ritual that made him consider becoming a Roman Catholic priest. While these experiences obviously relate to Scorsese's central themes, no shortlist of influences can single-handedly account for the variety of genres he's worked in or the full-bore intensity that surges through almost every film. This said, however, religion is a constant in his pictures, often in veiled and allusive ways. Roger Ebert illuminates this, and many other things, in *Scorsese by Ebert*, a collection of reviews and interviews written between 1967 and 2008.

Ebert is certainly cut out for this job. Another working-class Catholic born in 1942, he wrote the first review Scorsese ever received, instantly catching the religious overtones of *I Call First* at the Chicago film festival a year before the picture's final version, retitled *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, became Scorsese's debut theatrical release in 1969. Like many commentators, Ebert sees particularly compelling interest in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis's novel that slogged through several years, two studios, and swamps of fundamentalist protest before reaching the screen in 1988. More than most other critics, though, Ebert homes in on resonances between this hugely difficult production and the psychological drive that kept Scorsese plugging away at it when conventional wisdom said it would never get made. The reason for this doggedness, Ebert suggests, goes way beyond the religiosity in Scorsese's make-up, important though that is. When he made *The Last Temptation of Christ* he was making a movie not just about Jesus but about himself, using Christ's inner struggle as a vehicle for confronting and exploring his own spiritual conflicts, which have been anything but theoretical. Consider what Scorsese said to Ebert in a conversation about living with his current girlfriend after one of his divorces: "I am living in sin, and I will go to hell because of it." Ebert asked him if he really, truly believed that. "Yes, I do," was the reply (103).

With this in mind, it isn't hard to see the self-doubting savior played by Willem Dafoe as the same presence that haunts J. R. in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* and Charlie in *Mean Streets* (1973). Both of those characters are stand-ins for Scorsese, and both are played by Harvey Keitel, whose portrayal of Judas in *The Last Temptation of Christ* leads Ebert to suggest that Judas is another Scorsese surrogate—the mortal man walking beside the Messiah, "worrying about him, lecturing him, wanting him to be better, threatening him, confiding in him, prepared to betray him if he must. Christ is the film, and Judas is the director" (104). Insights this original on many films, including underappreciated ones like *The King of Comedy* (1982) and *After Hours* (1985), make this book a model of Scorsese criticism.

Ebert's writing on Scorsese and religion heightened my appreciation for a remarkable scene described by Thomas R. Lindlof in *Hollywood Under Siege: Martin Scorsese, the Religious Right, and the Culture Wars*. It transpired in 1982,

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when Paramount chairman Barry Diller asked Scorsese why he wanted to film Kazantzakis's novel and Scorsese solemnly replied, "Because I want to get to know Christ better." The chairman "didn't expect that answer," Scorsese remarked later. (I'll bet he didn't.) "What I was thinking of," Scorsese added, "is that . . . the act of making the film has to do with religion itself—*self-knowledge*. Which is not exactly what a Hollywood studio has in mind" (49).

Whatever he thought about Scorsese's search for self-knowledge, Diller ended this meeting—which also included studio president Michael Eisner and production chief Jeffrey Katzenberg—by saying, "Let's make the movie." At the end of 1983 the same executives met with Scorsese to say, in effect, "Let's *not* make the movie," so worried were they by budget increases and escalating protests against the studio and MCA, its parent company. For a while all seemed lost, but thanks to Scorsese's truly passionate belief in it, *The Last Temptation of Christ* proved as impossible to kill as its main character. *Hollywood Under Siege* chronicles its fitful progress without losing sight of the drama, humor, irony, and absurdity that constantly surrounded Scorsese's long, hard struggle to put his vision on the screen.

Four years after Paramount bailed, Universal picked up the project with a low-end budget, and Lindlof's account of the principal photography in Morocco is riveting. The incredibly tight schedule left literally no room for delays or adjustments. Eventually the team started gathering at each day's first location in the pitch of night, ready to start shooting when the first ray of sun appeared. Scorsese stopped looking at dailies to save the cost of shipping film to New York and back, and bad weather forced him to change the crucifixion timetable from eighty-plus setups in three days to fifty-five setups in two days. Here were images that Scorsese had been dreaming of, refining, and endlessly replaying in his mind for a third of his life, and now the adventure of making them real had, Lindlof writes, "devolved into an exercise in brute efficiency" during which crucial components had to be captured in "only a few chaotic hours" (120).

Back in Hollywood, meanwhile, storm clouds were gathering in the form of renewed protests by Christian conservatives who were not pleased that this particular Christ had been resurrected. The efforts to stop the film's release are the heart of Lindlof's book, and he recounts the battle in harrowing, sometimes uproarious detail, from Universal's proactive attempts to elicit support from media-savvy evangelical leaders (nice try) to publicity stunts organized by the likes of the Reverend R. L. Hymers, Jr., whose earlier deeds of Christlike compassion included leading a public prayer for the deaths of two United States Supreme Court justices because they favored reproductive freedom. It would take many pages to retell even the most striking episodes in these campaigns and countercampaigns, but mention must be made of the bitter anti-Semitism that repeatedly surfaced among the faithful, as when Hymers led a group chanting "Paid for with Jewish money!" to MCA chairman Lew Wasserman's home. The warfare was international in scope—thirteen countries officially banned the picture—and as ferocious on the protestors' side as it was anxiety-ridden in the studio's camp.

Apart from its value to Scorsese studies, *Hollywood Under Siege* is important for its larger social and cultural implications. The evangelical right's distinctive blend of cultural paranoia and self-righteous zeal acquired uncommon power in the second half of the 1980s, partly because the Christian right needed to compensate its wounded ego for Ronald Reagan's failure to deliver on social issues like abortion and school prayer. Additional impetus came from the rise of politico-religious demogogues like Jerry Falwell and James Dobson and the exponential growth of right-wing radio. When fundamentalists looked for causes to rally around, Scorsese's film about their personal savior was an all-too-obvious target. Hollywood was so skittish in its aftermath that studios hired the left-wing PR consultant Josh Baran to deploy "field crisis teams" (312) before opening potentially sensitive movies such as *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1990).

BOOK DATA

Scorsese by Ebert by Roger Ebert. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. $25.00 cloth; $16.00 paper. 297 pages.

Hollywood Under Siege: Martin Scorsese, the Religious Right, and the Culture Wars by Thomas R. Lindlof. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008. $32.50 cloth. 394 pages.

Gangster Priest: The Italian American Cinema of Martin Scorsese by Robert Casillo. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. $85.00 cloth; $39.95 paper. 600 pages.

The Philosophy of Martin Scorsese, ed. Mark T. Conard. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007. $35.00 cloth; $19.95 paper. 256 pages.

Martin Scorsese's "Raging Bull", ed. Kevin J. Hayes. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005. $85.00 cloth; $26.99 paper. 164 pages.

Martin Scorsese: A Biography by Vincent LoBrutto. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008. $44.95 cloth. 444 pages.

Lindlof waxes too optimistic at the end of his narrative, happy that *The Last Temptation of Christ* is "no longer captive to the agendas or polemical discourses of either the political left or right" (316). It's true that Scorsese's picture is no longer being co-opted by partisans looking for a fight, but this is because it has outlived its usefulness, not because a tide of reason and rationality has swept across the land. I have no doubt that equally idiotic culture attacks are yet to come; after all, only ten years have passed since New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani launched his ignorant vendetta against Chris Ofili's sacramental "elephant dung" painting of *The Holy Virgin*, and there's no shortage of people who want to make America an officially Christian country. All of which means that the controversies over Scorsese's picture still carry lessons worth learning.

I've given a lot of space to *The Last Temptation of Christ* because no other film consumed so many years of Scorsese's life or revealed so many of his deepest passions. Yet there's a vital facet of his art that the picture doesn't represent—the rich stories of Italian American life on which his reputation mainly rests. Robert Casillo studies these in *Gangster Priest: The Italian American Cinema of Martin Scorsese*, again placing Scorsese's conflicted Catholicism at center stage.

Scorsese's early plan to become a priest was not entirely based on selfless spirituality; as he has acknowledged more than once, he was seduced in part by the church's theatricality—its icons, music, and rituals—and he suspected that as a priest he would have more of an "inside line" (95) to salvation. He enrolled at a junior seminary school in 1956 but flunked out a year later, bushwhacked by low grades, poor discipline, and compulsive thinking about girls, girls, girls. Still, the influence of Catholicism remained extremely potent for him; despite his guilt about adolescent sexual thoughts and masturbation, he reported later that he "constantly" felt he was "communicating directly with God" and "having spiritual experiences." After listening to stern Jesuit sermons during a religious retreat, for instance, he had what Casillo describes as an episode of "guilt and mysticism" (96). That night the country noises outside seemed like an "auditory hallucination" and "smudges on the window become like the face on the Shroud," he recalled years afterward. Eventually he got up and prayed in a "special grotto," but he remained so distressed that a priest said he should see a Catholic psychiatrist. This sounds like excellent advice to me, and in fact Scorsese started psychotherapy that lasted seven years.

The point here is not that teenage Marty had a dark night of the soul, but that this experience and others like it affected him so strongly that his definition of "living the good life" still means "practicing the tenets of Christianity" (97). Although he left the church in the early 1960s, Casillo shows that he weaves Catholicism into virtually all aspects of his pictures, from the blood-red interior of a *Mean Streets* bar to the ubiquitous gambling in *Casino* (1995) that signals the possibility of grace abruptly entering the most humble slot-player's life. Scorsese's films can't be understood without the keys provided by his idiosyncratic Christianity—not the intellectual Jesuit variety but the more haunting and elusive kind that Flannery O'Connor calls "wise blood," wholly instinctive and all the more unshakeable for that.

Gangster Priest takes its title from two thematic archetypes that shape Scorsese's films about Italian American characters, neighborhoods, and ethnic attributes. It begins by etching Scorsese's close emotional ties to the first and second generations of Italian American immigrants, whose values he absorbed through cultural osmosis in his parents' household and the Sicilian American neighborhood where the family lived. Casillo then gives a detailed account of Italian immigration to the U.S. from the 1870s on (Scorsese's grandparents arrived soon after 1900) and discusses numerous folkways and mores that loom importantly in Scorsese's films. These include *famiglia*, Sicilian style, which places trust in the family unit more than the individual or state; *omertà*, the practice of reserve and silence except among family and friends; wariness toward education; preference for oral and visual rather than written communication; and more. Along the way Casillo notes the appeal of city life for escapees from agrarian poverty, critiques the sociological claim that "amoral familism" has fostered civic apathy among southern Italian immigrants, and parses the semiotics of Catherine Scorsese's homemade tomato sauce. He also studies Scorsese as an example of and an exception to the typical patterns of third-generation Italian American culture, with especially knowledgeable pages on the Mediterranean masculinity cult with its attendant values of honor and shame.

The remainder of the book offers painstaking analyses of the five movies—*Who's That Knocking at My Door*, *Mean Streets*, *Raging Bull* (1980), *GoodFellas* (1990), and *Casino*—that constitute the Italian American portion of Scorsese's *oeuvre*. The pivotal theorist in these chapters is René Girard, who contends that social and religious desire are grounded not in instinct but in imitation; that the sacred and the violent are inextricably linked; that breakdowns of social order and "sacrificial crises" are typically resolved by the selection and elimination of scapegoats; and that the priestly rituals associated with this practice allow the community to purge its collective guilt through disguised mimesis of the crisis that called the guilt into being.

Casillo reaps good dividends from Girard's theories, as when he applies the concept of the *turba*, the "all-engulfing vortical chaos" (165) of sacrificial crises, to aspects of Scorsese's camerawork and mise-en-scène, and when he links two laughter-surrounded murders in *GoodFellas* to the joy induced by exterminated scapegoats. The book's treatment of the *Imitatio Christi* tradition, interpreted by Girard as a call for the repudiation of mimetic conflict and social violence, elicits very productive insights with respect to *Raging Bull*, which Scorsese took on at a time of personal crises—the 1977 failure of *New York, New York*, drug dependency, fears of professional catastrophe—in an attempt "to diagnose and to exorcise his own demons of anger, retaliatory violence, and masochism" (393). In passages like these, *Gangster Priest* is an exceptional work.

I must add, however, that Casillo's privileging of Girard has the effect of crowding out other approaches that could have cast light on this material; a bit more investigation of psychoanalytic thought, for instance, might help him grasp the overlap between homosociality and homosexuality, and might modify his unsupported notion that "the whole tired apparatus of repression and the Freudian conception of the unconscious" (242) are unproven and outdated. More fundamentally, the undeniable focus that Casillo gains by zeroing in on the Italian American movies is countered by the exclusion of other films. Surely it's reasonable to explore the Italian American films' relationships with other Scorsese pictures, which also have roots in his Italian American sensibility; yet works as crucial as *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *The Last Temptation of Christ* receive a mere five references apiece, recent films like *Gangs of New York* (2002) and *The Aviator* (2004) fewer still. Occasional facts given in the book also raised my eyebrows—for one small example, why is "Season of the Witch," the working title of *Mean Streets*, attributed to Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper, who covered the song in 1968, rather than Donovan, who wrote and popularized it two years earlier? But these flaws are outweighed by Casillo's overall achievement, which is imaginative, erudite, and comprehensive.

The Philosophy of Martin Scorsese, edited by Mark T. Conard, hails from the growing field of essay books using items from popular culture as launching pads for philosophical musings. (What hath Slavoj Žižek wrought?) Deborah Knight notes the hazards of this enterprise at the beginning of her contribution to it: "Scorsese is . . . not a philosopher [and] narrative fiction filmmaking . . . is not directly assimilable to the practice of philosophy. Fiction films do not operate by means of reasons and arguments" (93). Knight then carves out a modest exception, allowing that certain films can be taken as illustrating some philosophical point. I agree with Knight's position, and I'll enlarge her exception a bit by saying that certain films go beyond *illustrating* a philosophical point to usefully *testing* or *exploring* it. These three things are what the best essays in Conard's collection do.

The volume has three sections: "Authenticity, Flourishing, and the Good Life," dealing with such matters as vigilantism in *Taxi Driver* and the good life in *GoodFellas*; "Rationality, Criminality, and the Emotions," applying Blaise Pascal to *The King of Comedy* and Friedrich Nietzche to *Cape Fear* (1991), among other things; and "Vision, Salvation, and the Transcendental," treating such topics as the moral universe of *Casino* and reluctant saviors in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999). All of the subjects and most of the essays are interesting. My favorites include Richard Gilmore's witty analysis of "Art, Sex, and Time in Scorsese's *After Hours*," which would be better still if Gilles Deleuze came into it, and Jennifer L. McMahon's existentialist take on the same fascinating film in "*After Hours*: Scorsese on Absurdity." Conard weighs in thoughtfully with "*Mean Streets*: Beatitude, Flourishing, and Unhappiness," and R. Barton Palmer contributes an intelligent essay on "Scorsese and the Transcendental," although it's puzzling to see *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* labeled "genre projects" as opposed to "auteurist films," and to find *GoodFellas* and *Casino* called "more obviously commercial than any of [Scorsese's] other projects," as if, say, *The Last Waltz* (1978) and *The Color of Money* (1986) were more of those "auteurist films."

The volume would be stronger if all of its writers were equally well versed in film studies and philosophy. Some essays don't have much of the latter: Knight's paper, "*The Age of Innocence*: Social Semiotics, Desire, and Constraint," is genteel cultural criticism of the 1993 movie, and Judith Barad's work on "The Ethical Underpinnings of *Kundun*" draws primarily on writings by the Dalai Lama, the 1997 film's real-life protagonist, noting parallels with the Stoics here and there. Conversely, film scholarship runs thin in some essays. Exhibit A is "The Cinema of Madness: Friedrich Nietzche and the Films of Martin Scorsese," which Jerold J. Abrams begins with a series of statements that the maddest of cinema scholars would never come out with: "Martin Scorsese is the greatest director alive. Every film scholar knows that . . . [His] paradigm [films] are about violence, typically gang violence . . . Inevitably, aficionados leave it at just *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*: the early masterpieces. That's my view too. And future film scholars will, no doubt, look back as well and claim that Scorsese simply defines the genre of gangster cinema" (75). Where would one begin to correct this—with the overblown parts, the reductive parts, the flat-

out wrong parts? And then there's "Flying Solo: *The Aviator* and Libertarian Philosophy" by Paul A. Cantor, which is in a class by itself. I find some elements of libertarian thought quite suggestive, but Cantor espouses all the other ones, tipping his hat at one point to Ayn Rand, whose notions even Alan Greenspan eventually slunk away from. In the first paragraph we find the anti-Semitic Charles Lindbergh hailed as "the quintessential all-American hero" (165) and in the last we learn that "one does not have to be a morally good man in order to serve the public good" (184). That's entertainment?

Martin Scorsese's "Raging Bull", edited by Kevin J. Hayes, presents a smaller group of essays that's also more consistent, thanks in part to its concern with a single film. Todd Berliner's examination of "Visual Absurdity in *Raging Bull*" bears a slight resemblance to McMahon's aforementioned work on *After Hours*, but uses intensive shot, frame, and sound analysis to unpack the "unobtrusive nonsense" that Scorsese carefully built into his purposefully punch-drunk tour de force. It's a smart essay with just two drawbacks: the conclusion is less than exciting—elements of conventional style help viewers cope with mismatched cuts and inexplicable noises—and Berliner seems to assume that moviegoers take in films one image at a time rather than in multi-image clumps that get differentiated and sorted out only with repeated viewings. The best essay is "*Raging Bull* and the Idea of Performance" by Michael Peterson, who draws from performance studies (a neighboring field too rarely consulted by film scholars) to probe the film's dual nature as a drama about both Robert De Niro and the nominal protagonist. In the process it offers an implicit critique of gaze theory à la Laura Mulvey, and the essay would be better still if this were made explicit and emphatic. In any case, Mulvey regains her ground when Peggy McCormack recycles her work in "Women in *Raging Bull*: Scorsese's Use of Determinist, Objective, and Subjective Techniques." Rounding out the essays, Leger Grindon writes on "Art and Genre in *Raging Bull*" and Mark Nicholls makes a semi-persuasive case for *Raging Bull* as a dialogue with Vincente Minnelli's melodrama *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) while discussing the Scorsese picture's melancholia. Reprints of half a dozen journalistic reviews complete the book.

Last and least, it's my unpleasant duty to report that *Martin Scorsese: A Biography* by Vincent LoBrutto is by far the weakest of this crop of books. One problem is its structure, with endlessly long rehashes of some films (*Who's That Knocking at My Door*, *Mean Streets*, *Cape Fear*) and hasty, flimsy glances at others (*After Hours*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Casino*). Another problem is that it's hardly a biography—after occasional cryptic references to Scorsese's various wives, for instance, a brief chapter called "Five Marriages" pops up just before the end, as if the author remembered to stick in a few words on the subject just before his deadline at the printer. But the biggest problem is the prose, replete with misspelled words (felatio, au currant), misspelled names (Zanadu, Robert DeNiro, Katherine Hepburn), redundancies ("Scorsese's gangster trilogy is an epic triad"), and locutions like "one of the highest divorce rates in American human history" (356)—as opposed to American space-alien history, I suppose. Scorsese deserves better. The collective message of these books is that the more deeply and persistently critics, theorists, and historians delve into his works, the more they find there. The gangster priest is proving to be a filmmaker for the ages.

DAVID STERRITT, *Film Quarterly*'s Chief Book Critic, appeared with Martin Scorsese on *Nightline* to discuss *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988.

JOHN BELTON

The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft by Anne Friedberg

The late Anne Friedberg's project in this book is tremendously ambitious. Through the vantage point of new media, she returns to 1970s apparatus theory to write a history of vision and visuality ("the social, psychical, and historical habits of vision") from the fifteenth century to the present. Exploring discursive metaphors employed in art history, architectural history, film and television studies, and new media, she lays out an historical trajectory that traces the evolution of virtual imaging from window to frame to screen and then to Windows (Microsoft's trademarked operating software). As virtual imaging evolves or changes so does the subjectivity of the spectator. If the spectator of Alberti's "open window" (which is associated with the symbolic form of artificial perspective) is a single viewer fixed in space and framed by a virtual window, that of the graphic user interface of Windows involves multiple views and perspectives, positing a fragmented (and potentially mobile) viewer. The relations among viewer and view constantly shift as the nature of the apparatus changes from window to frame to camera obscura, still and movie photography, television, and computer.

Following Walter Benjamin, Jonathan Crary, and others, Friedberg argues that human sense perception changes with its mode of existence and that the cinema marks such a change, as does the advent of the personal computer. The fixed position of the viewer of a painting gives way to the

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Following Walter Benjamin, Jonathan Crary, and others, Friedberg argues that human sense perception changes with its mode of existence and that the cinema marks such a change, as does the advent of the personal computer. The fixed position of the viewer of a painting gives way to the

"virtual mobility" of the film spectator who experiences, according to Erwin Panofsky, a "dynamization of space" and a "spatialization of time" (45). The computer screen witnesses the death of perspectival space as the vernacular mode of perception and introduces a new perspectival mode based on fragmentation, frontality, overlapping, and the suppression of depth. The computer's multiple windows and desktop array of icons fragment the unity of the contemporary subject whose multi-tasking activities result in what Siegfried Kracauer and Benjamin (writing about the movie palaces of the 1920s) referred to as "reception in a state of distraction" (168).

Friedberg qualifies this broad sense of monolithic perceptual modes in important ways. She acknowledges that the fixed-station position of Renaissance linear perspective coexisted with a polyscenic address in which multiple images were combined in one painting, resembling the scrolls in Gothic art. The virtual mobility of cinema is only on the screen; the spectator remains fixed in a seat in the theater. At the same time, the unity of the pre-digital, cinematic subject is occasionally fragmented—most obviously in films that rely on multiple or split screens, as in *Chelsea Girls* (1966), *Grand Prix* (1966), and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968). Friedberg is less successful in qualifying contemporary modes of perception, which she refers to (rather broadly) as "postperspectival, post cinematic, and post-televisual" (7, 194). For her, contemporary screens on which images are displayed have undergone convergence and the various imaging technologies have lost "their apparatical distinctions" (238). Though digital technology threatens to erase the differences among traditional media, transforming all imaging into bits and bytes, significantly different spectatorial experiences continue to provide various distinct modes of perception ranging from Imax (immersive), digital 3D (emergent), and 35mm projection to television, computer screen, and iPod/iPhone.

Although the word "virtual" is in the title, this is not a book about digital cinema or digital technology. Friedberg devotes only twenty pages to computer technology. The bulk of the book engages with more traditional discourses related to the representation of space and perspective in art history and architecture. Friedberg's ultimate target is apparatus theory—in particular, Stephen Heath and Jean-Louis Baudry, who invoke art-historical concepts such as Renaissance perspective and the camera obscura to make claims about spectator positioning in the cinema. Friedberg insists on foregrounding the differences among the various virtual images generated by the window, frame, and camera obscura, stressing that the latter is an interior view of an exterior world that coexists temporally and semi-spatially with the observer, that can contain motion, and that is upside-down and laterally reversed. Baudry's discussion of the ideological effects of the basic apparatus proves to be a "densely reductive account" (75).

Friedberg also reviews debates within architectural history over the size, shape, and function of windows, noting a shift in their function from admitting light and air to framing a view. Citing a famous exchange between Le Corbusier and his former teacher, August Perret, Friedberg explores the differences between horizontal and vertical windows which anticipates discussions in the late 1920s about the shape of the motion-picture screen in which Eisenstein argued against the mainstream for a vertical as opposed to horizontal screen.

Friedberg's discussion of the "Age of Windows" (the seventeenth to the twentieth century) includes a fascinating history of glass and glass-making. The advent of plate glass in the late seventeenth century, magnificently implemented in the Galerie de glaces at Versailles, introduced a new visuality, producing a two-way transparency. Through the plate-glass window, one could look outward from a private space into the exterior world or, in the case of a display window, look inward from a public space into a world of consumer goods. In the nineteenth century, with the Crystal Palace, glass emerged as a major material in architectural construction, providing both transparency and protection and functioning as a material of dematerialization. Enabling both interior and exterior to be seen simultaneously, the plate-glass window mirrored the revolution in vision that took place in cubist painting.

Friedberg's history of the motion-picture screen lacks the thoroughness of her research into windows and glass. In fact, it is more theoretical than historical in orientation, paying little attention to the ways in which changes in theater design change the mode of reception of the spectator and devoting little attention to specific theaters (with the notable exception of Frederick Keisler's Film Guild Theater in New York).

An important intervention into contemporary discourses on visuality, *The Virtual Window* brings apparatus theory up to if not into the twenty-first century. © 2009 John Belton

JOHN BELTON teaches film at Rutgers University and is currently an Academy Film Scholar, working on a book on the history of motion-picture color.

BOOK DATA Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. $36.95 cloth, $17.95 paper. 448 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World by Stacey Abbott

The Hollywood Horror Film 1931–1941: Madness in a Social Landscape by Reynold Humphries

Books about horror films have often drawn parallels between cinematic illusions and the nightmarish living dead of Gothic fiction. Just as the monstrous figure of the vampire survives death, so too do the preservative powers of cinema enable an alluring but deceptive, spectral immortality. As Stacey Abbott puts it in *Celluloid Vampires*, film can only sustain "ghostly shadows of the dead that are reanimated through technological means" (42). Entering an area of criticism which includes such fine books as Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire* (Routledge, 1994) and Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), Abbott differentiates her thesis from the outset by arguing that the endless generic and iconic reinvention of the cinematic vampire repeatedly "embodies a legacy of transformation that expresses the experience of modernity" (215). Rather than being fixed, archaic symbols, screen vampires register a modern cycle of disintegration and renewal. From *Le manoir du diable* (1896) and *Nosferatu* (1922) through to the likes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and the computer-generated fiends of *Underworld* (2003) and *Van Helsing* (2004), *Celluloid Vampires* traces the social, cultural, and historical shifts which inform and ideologically underpin the various manifestations of the screen vampire. Like the immortal vampire who must through necessity adapt to each new epoch he or she lives through, so too must the vampire film renew itself, modernize in order to survive.

Celluloid Vampires' strongest suit is its lucid, thoughtful combination of broad historical contextualization and impressively close attention to key texts. Excellent individual chapters on Bram Stoker's inaugural *Dracula* (1897), *Nosferatu*, and George Romero's revisionist *Martin* (1977) are all exemplary of Abbott's method. Although the sections on Stoker's novel and Murnau's expressionist masterpiece cover what for some readers may be familiar material, the synthesis of detailed analysis and pleasingly jargon-free prose is both authoritative in tone and critically agile—as with her commentary on the *fin de siècle* emergence of new modernist realities in *Dracula* or the "legacy of spectral technology" (51) and metacinematic sophistication at the heart of *Nosferatu*. However, *Celluloid Vampires* is probably most compelling when it deals with more recent vampire fictions. For Abbott, the independently produced *Martin* sees the genre's key motifs reworked as an allegory of generational tension and post-industrial decline, a distinctly secular vampirism functioning here as symbol for 1970s America's sense of social paralysis and identity crisis. *Blacula* (1972), meanwhile, revises the latent racism of earlier vampire narratives for post-civil rights America, in turn prefiguring the 1998–2004 *Blade* saga's engagement with issues of multiculturalism in Los Angeles in the wake of the assault on Rodney King. This interest in the relationship between specific urban environments and what might be usefully dubbed "vampire identity politics" also emerges in a fascinating chapter on lone female vampires in New York-set films: *The Hunger* (1983), *Nadja* (1994), *The Addiction* (1995), and the less well-known *Habit* (1996), directed by Larry Fessenden. Abbot argues persuasively that these films subvert the traditional masculine associations of New York (as in the films of Woody Allen or Martin Scorsese) by introducing a vampire *flâneuse* who can "embody modernity by embracing the delirium that signifies modern New York" (147), a move which in turn anticipates the "vampish" socialites of *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) emergent on the gendered horizon.

Other parts of *Celluloid Vampires* are less convincing. Horror aficionados may balk at Abbott's claim that *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) is best understood as prefiguring trends in vampire cinema. *Celluloid Vampires*' overview of the playful, sophisticated self-consciousness and increasingly gruesome special effects of recent entries in the vampire genre fails to acknowledge that such variations may be better understood as developments in horror films more broadly. Abbott's lively account of vampire films' response to the social upheavals of the 1960s romanticizes the emergent New Hollywood, whose politics were by no means uniformly radical. Finally, her assertion that *The Lost Boys* (1987)—set in a small Californian beach town and filmed in Santa Cruz, which no one would call a metropolis—exemplifies "the prevalence of postmodern alienation that defines Los Angeles" (178) seems overblown. Overall, however, *Celluloid Vampires* intelligently and accessibly charts vampire evolution from *Nosferatu*'s diseased Eastern European wraith, through the malevolent sensuality of *Horror of Dracula* (1958), to today's tech-savvy genetic mutants equipped with sophisticated hardware and post-human DNA. *Celluloid Vampires* is a valuable and wide-ranging account of the ever-evolving mythologies and generic transformations of this nomadic, hybrid, and transnational creature.

Whereas Abbott mostly avoids a psychosexual approach, Reynold Humphries' *The Hollywood Horror Film, 1931–1941*

adheres to what might even be called an old-fashioned (if not quite undead) Freudian-Marxist paradigm, an approach that in this context recalls Robin Wood's writing from the 1970s. Humphries is in fact unabashed in his defence of what some might think an anachronistic approach. The study is, he says, "an attempt to turn the clock back" (xiv) to a time when the grand theoretical-political project of melding Freud and Marx seemed necessary and radical. Humphries presents his project with engaging self-awareness, sometimes even presenting himself as a kind of mad scientist or doctor (a type of film character he discusses), "driven by an insatiable desire for truth and knowledge, noble sentiments that all too often lead to a rejection of society's most precious values (i.e., presuppositions)" (x). Such self-appointed critical radicalism has many pitfalls, however, particularly when a study of popular cinema such as this is underscored by a sweepingly pessimistic belief that "the average film, produced as it is for instant and unthinking consumption, produces a feeling of pleasure, satisfaction, and imaginary gratification that is debilitating in the extreme" (xii). Humphries' often quixotic zeal is not without its pleasures, however. A lively analysis of *King Kong* (1933) ponders idiosyncratically and at length whether the eponymous ape is actually *female*, and revisionist claims abound: *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), for example, is argued to be superior to its acclaimed predecessors *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). It is also pleasing that neglected films such as *The Monster and the Girl* and *The Devil Commands* (both 1940) are properly considered alongside canonical films like *The Mummy* (1932) and *The Wolf Man* (1941). *The Hollywood Horror Film* furthermore benefits from original archival research.

It would be hard to dispute the productivity of psychoanalytic approaches to horror fiction and one should add that filmmakers have sometimes ostentatiously borrowed from psychoanalysis, Rouben Mamoulian's wonderful *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931) being perhaps the best example. But when Humphries insists that a knowledge of the hallucinatory nature of the "maternal phallus is . . . essential to an understanding" (16) of *Dracula*, many non-Lacanian viewers of Tod Browning's 1931 film starring Bela Lugosi are likely to demur. Humphries' application of a historical-materialist perspective in the second half of the book reaps consistently greater rewards, particularly when he analyzes repressed socioeconomic concerns in Depression-era horror movies. Lively readings of *White Zombie* (1932), *The Vampire Bat*, and *Son of Kong* (both 1933), for example, highlight the political ramifications of the movies and underscore the significance of Marx's frequent use of the Gothic imagery of ghouls and ghosts. While it is easy to sympathize with Humphries' sometimes bewitching methodological fervor, *The Hollywood Horror Film, 1931–1941* is rather too much like a haunted house, full of cantankerous old theoretical ghosts. © 2009 Martin Fradley

MARTIN FRADLEY teaches at the University of Manchester, U.K., and is a regular contributor to *Film Quarterly*.

BOOK DATA Stacey Abbott, *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. $55.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 278 pages.

Reynold Humphries, *The Hollywood Horror Film 1931–1941: Madness in a Social Landscape*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006. $45.00 paper. 300 pages.

CYNTHIA BARON AND BECKETT WARREN

Mae West: It Ain't No Sin by Simon Louvish
Johnny Depp Starts Here by Murray Pomerance

These two star studies represent the strengths and weaknesses of, respectively, archive-based cultural history and a more impressionistic approach. In *Mae West: It Ain't No Sin*, Simon Louvish claims that "when one peers behind the mask of glamour, hype, publicity and subterfuge, Mae West's great secret [was] that she went home to her apartment or hotel room at night and wrote" (87). He takes his cue from Emily Wortis Leider in *Becoming Mae West* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), who sees West as an author and as "a crafty and hardworking pro" whose provocative public appearances represented "premeditated abandon, calculated for maximum shock or show-stopping effect" (3, 4). Louvish's careful review of materials allows him to establish a distance from various myths that surround West; dismissing the joke in her 1959 autobiography, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do with It*, that if she ever "kept a diary it would have to be written in invisible ink," Louvish considers recently available archival papers that document West's painstaking process of redrafting one-liners, treatments, and scripts in order to analyze and describe the entertainer's place in American stage and screen history. Louvish's interest in West as an author and performer represents a departure from studies that have explored the star's subversiveness and sexuality. At various points, Louvish explicitly addresses the work of "previous chroniclers" (105). In one instance, he refutes the claim that West had an affair with crime boss Owney Madden; in another, he revisits debates about West's racial and sexual politics. Reckoning with the fact that "Mae's treatment of her black characters [and] use of shock expectations and out-and-out exploitation of the 'vice' milieu of Harlem has [stymied] interpreters battling to square Mae's status as the iconic pioneer feminist with her

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stereotyped portrayals of blacks" (175), Louvish pauses to note that mainstream views on sexual and racial matters in the 1920s and 1920s differ from current perspectives.

Some readers will likely object that Louvish downplays West's racism and African Americans' critical view of her stage and screen portrayals, yet it is worth noting that his interest is in the era's larger aesthetic and cultural developments, which were distinguished in part by the widening influence of artists like Bessie Smith and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Presenting readers with a rather succinct account of ragtime, jazz, and American entertainment, Louvish describes a process that can be traced "from the 'ragtime' craze of the 1890s to Bert Williams and the all-black shows of the 1900s through to a young white kid named Irving Berlin, who began in 1911 to write the 1,500-plus songs that would make black rhythms into white America's most popular tunes" (75). The balance Louvish strikes between the representative and specific dimensions of West's use of black music is also evident in his analysis of West's stage career, which Louvish places in context through accounts of burlesque, vaudeville, Broadway revues, and legit theater, and comparisons between West and entertainers ranging from Lillian Russell to W. C. Fields. The wealth of information Louvish brings to bear reflects his background as one of the primary chroniclers of Fields, Laurel and Hardy, the Marx brothers, and Mack Sennett. It also underlies his productive interdisciplinary history of American theater and film. He notes, for instance, that in the 1920s vaudeville lost ground to silent comedies and that West contended with "the continuing dominance of the old-time vaudeville greats" (103) like Eva Tanguay. He reminds us that West's salacious work existed alongside sensational stage and screen productions like *The Shanghai Gesture* and magazines like *Snappy Stories*. Louvish also sheds new light on the censorship battles over West's films, weaving in William Randolph Hearst's orchestrated attack on her career, which takes on real salience when he notes that in 1935 Mae was "the top salaried female in the US, earning a gross of $480,833, the only person surpassing her being, ironically, Hearst himself" (301).

Murray Pomerance's approach to star studies is more personal and improvised. *Johnny Depp Starts Here* rejects studies that contextualize a star's image and characterizations, explicitly stating that his analysis runs counter to work by Richard Dyer, Paul McDonald, and others who examine the "audience's methods of interpretation" (10). This is a provocative move because some new work in star studies has placed an increased emphasis on industry practices and films' relationships with consumers, as demonstrated in the collection edited by Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin, *Looking Past the Screen* (Duke University Press, 2007). Pomerance's approach by contrast seems more in tune with psychological ideas outlined in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," for one of Laura Mulvey's insights was that voyeurism precludes emotional engagement between subject and object; such engagement depends on Hollywood films offering "ego ideals [with] stars centering both screen presence and screen story." Given Pomerance's impressionistic rendering of the actor, Depp might even be said to represent an "ego ideal" for Pomerance—although a paradoxically elusive one. After exploring associations that come to him as he ponders "my Johnny Depp" (14), Pomerance adds: "To discover the 'real, real' Johnny Depp we must be willing to confront emptiness" (85). Pomerance argues that Depp has no authentic self: "what makes Depp so peculiar and so vitally interesting is exactly that he is ungraspable" (10). Yet Depp is hardly the first actor to be known for this quality. In *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (University of Michigan Press, 1993), Joseph R. Roach quotes Denis Diderot's 1830 remark that the finest actors "are fit to play all characters because they have none" (136). Further, Depp is like a number of stars in the post-Warhol era, able to embody what Peter Wollen has described in *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth Century Culture* (Verso, 2008) as the commodity "to-be-looked-at . . . in a further gesture of theatricality" (164). The star persona Pomerance discovers is precisely the commodified one found in corporate publicity. As he notes, "publicity has made of Depp a protean movie star . . . Offscreen, the Depp with whom we have been presented is inchoate, fluid, developing, never finished—in short, and once again!—*no thing*" (84–85). But in stating that "the contemporary publicity machine is producing of Johnny Depp a colossal riddle, largely, perhaps, because the riddle is a perfect center in a film for viewing" (104), Pomerance arguably is more indebted than he acknowledges to other studies that have shown how the circulation of an indeterminate, interactive persona is a basic corporate strategy in the post-studio era.

Pomerance's disinterest in socioeconomic context makes his own commentary the center of attention; his "extended riff" (13) on Depp becomes what Guy Debord describes in "For a Revolutionary Judgment of Art," collected in *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents* (AK Press, 2003) as "a second-degree spectacle," in which the critic "makes a spectacle out of his very condition as a spectator—a specialized and therefore ideal spectator, expressing his ideas and feelings *about* a work in which he does not really participate" (216). To be sure, Pomerance cites Debord: after arguing for the entire book that Depp "throws in our face any attempt to use theory on him" (10), Pomerance mentions Debord's work as a "theoretical avenue" consistent with his own approach

(259). However, given the clash between Pomerance's "riff" and Debord's critique of second-degree spectacle, a reader may have doubts about the existence of common ground, especially since Pomerance refers to Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* as *Cinema of Spectacle* (259). *Johnny Depp Starts Here* has its own emptiness, absence, no-thing. Pomerance fails to analyze material factors; his book has no political grounding, and the botched appeal to *The Society of the Spectacle* perhaps reflects little more than the Situationist International's growing chic within academia. While Depp's stardom belongs to an emerging trend in consumer society, he is not the source of his image, not unique, mysterious, or subversive. Such traits are anathema to the star system, which is indivisible from corporate stability and corporate capital, as Debord (and Walter Benjamin before him) understood. © 2009 Cynthia Baron and Beckett Warren

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BOOK DATA Simon Louvish, *Mae West: It Ain't No Sin*. 2nd edition. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007. $17.95 paper. 512 pages.

Murray Pomerance, *Johnny Deep Starts Here*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005. $62.00 cloth; $21.95 paper. 308 pages.

DARRELL WILLIAM DAVIS

Kitano Takeshi by Aaron Gerow

A new book by Aaron Gerow on Japan's best-known contemporary filmmaker is very welcome, promising a reliable, scrupulous, and illuminating account. That Gerow's handling of his subject would fulfill expectations is no surprise, but wait, there's more . . . a spark of humor, occasioned perhaps by the acid tongue of Kitano himself, a cunning raconteur and satirist who has held court over Japan's airwaves for the last twenty-five years. It is pleasing to imagine Yale professor Gerow composing this sentence on the gangster played by Kitano in *Boiling Point* (1990): "Kitano takes the homosocial space of the action film, which maintains a precarious balance between masculine camaraderie and the rejection of homosexuality, and pushes it to the extreme through characters like Uehara, who is just as willing to bugger his buddy as fuck his moll" (55). Bon mots like this enliven the discussion, an echo of Kitano-like quips, and underscore the infuriating duality at the core of Kitano's work.

Kitano's duality stems from his distinct industry roles: his status as the world knows him, a seasoned film auteur; and then as millions of Japanese see him, a nightly fixture in media performance: wildly prolix TV celebrity, *tarento*, salesman, author. Gerow has made a major contribution in detailing Kitano's public persona, whose provocation of Japanese audiences spans many years and media formats. This duality can also be traced further into the roots of comic style, especially the antagonism of straight man/fool in *manzai*, the stand-up routine in which Kitano first made his name in the late 1970s. Gerow elaborates on this throughout, detailing the interdependency of *tsukkomi* and *boke*, the scold and the prankster. This pair forms a double-sided dialectic, opposites that mutually attract and repulse, played riotously by the Two Beats, the act which generated Kitano's first big television breakthrough. But if these two are precarious, the beats are unstable and unbalanced, as Kitano—performer and filmmaker—pushed the straight role virtually off the map, "as if the *boke* had gotten off the leash" (22). Initially this gave the impression that Kitano was a force of radical critique, a "poisonous tongue" exposing social hypocrisy. But it became plain that he could not be classified in this way. He has been consistently inconsistent, manifesting an "allergy towards politics" (33) that effectively popularized an evasive, fence-sitting dismissal of social involvement, let alone activism. Gerow goes further, saying that Kitano's pronouncements and style may have encouraged right-wing ideas in mass culture, but only if fans were taking him seriously. This is not easy to tell, as Gerow uses Japanese comedy theory to argue that, thanks to Kitano, *tsukkomi* became more an assumed rather than an active presence on stage, with the comedy consisting in mere recognition, "tracing," and sheer momentum (25).

Gerow ably locates Kitano in film criticism, especially Japanese film criticism. One learns a great deal about Japanese writing (both academic and journalistic) about Kitano. A fine section is devoted to Hasumi Shigehiko, the Tokyo University literature scholar who did much to raise Kitano's profile. In Hasumi's view, Kitano emerges as an aesthetic primitive, with an instinctive grasp of the materiality of cinema, "close to being completely unconscious" (44). Hasumi has also praised Kitano's rejection of character psychology, affirming a semi-Bazinian idea of cinematic creation on the

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HUNTER VAUGHAN

Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression by Martine Beugnet

Extending the post-feminist analyses in Barbara M. Kennedy's *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003) and Laura U. Marks's *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) to the question of national cinema, Martine Beugnet addresses matters of style, sensation, and sexuality in recent French films by Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, and others. Her emphasis is on sensory problems rather than representational ones—on the haptic, or what she calls "cinema's intensely tactile quality" (2). Through shifting focus, unusual angles and disruptive framing schemas, graphic editing, and the combination of different media formats, the films Beugnet discusses present us, she argues, with a "constant passage from optical to haptic perception, where the material presence of the image competes with, and often supersedes, its representational power" (68).

Echoing recent French philosophical writing about cinema (Jacques Rancière, Jean-Louis Schéfer), and drawing on the work of both Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze, Beugnet is particularly interested in wresting film criticism from what she regards as an overvaluation of ideas of mimesis, insisting instead that cinematic images perform a type of thinking, and that our access to them occurs on a level of direct affect rather than cognition. She aligns this argument with remarks about ideology and cultural politics: "Films do not just provide life-like testimonies on their contemporary world; as flowing, embodied forms of thought, they can help us imagine ways out of the dead ends down which dual thinking leads us. I hope to show how French cinema, emerging against the backdrop of modernity's contradictions, offers valuable, thought-provoking variations and lines of flight on those issues that have been at the core of contemporary debates on culture, identity and change" (17). Beugnet begins her task by discussing the convergence between filmmaking and film theory generated by films that relinquish the clearly representational for more abstract modes. She concentrates on the way some recent French cinema challenges our traditional image-centric understanding of the separation between subjective eyes and objective world. Beugnet then extends her analysis of the "cinema of the sense" to a broader sociological and geopolitical level, connecting the philosophical effect of this new cinema with collapses in social and political structures of difference such as gender and ethnicity. Beugnet develops her theoretical starting points through a "progressive" form of textual analysis of films which "work . . . like blocks of sensations pieced together to form monstrous constructs caught in a constant process of metamorphosis" (18).

The author confesses that the book may itself seem quite abstract, but asserts that this is necessary for films that defy traditional protocols of representation, which disrupt conventional storytelling and binary systems—films that "blur the line between inside and outside, sensory and conceptual, subjective and objective" (108). Insisting that "the arguments presented . . . develop from the films themselves" (18), Beugnet defends the artistic and even philosophical importance of a series of explicit and sometimes scandalous films: *Romance* (1999), *Baise-moi* (2000), *Irreversible* (2002), and *Trouble Every Day* (2004). The analyses often involve useful discussion of gender and sexuality, especially in the context of debates about extreme cinematic representations of sex. She provides a particularly clear and insightful analysis of Breillat's *Romance*, exploring how it "directly addresses and demystifies not only the kind of clichéd perceptions of the feminine epitomized in pornography, but also conventional definitions of the female as abject as well as stereotypical notions of femininity as mystery." (48) This is produced, Begunet points out, through an unconventional construction of female subjectivity through voiceover narration, direct address, and surreal insert scenes. Similarly, she argues that the use of video-based imagery dispels the pornographic voyeurism otherwise possible in *Baise-moi*, a rape-revenge film that achieves a tactile quality, according to Beugnet, not on account of the representation of human flesh so much as the use of video images. (Beugnet refers to Marks's *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* [Duke University Press, 2000] in order to consider the sensory effect of contrast ratio and pixel density—in other words, "graininess"—on the viewing experience.) These are just two examples in a book replete with such analyses, through which Beugnet questions "conventional approaches and tools of film theory and criticism" are up to the task of developing "more than a superficial appraisal of contemporary film works" (55). *Cinema and Sensation* persuasively argues that the radical styles of recent French films merit new theories and approaches. © 2009 Hunter Vaughan

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BOOK DATA Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press/Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007. $65.00 cloth. 208 pages.

RUNAWAYS

In the wake of World War II, Hollywood, in Robert R. Shandley's words, "underwent a series of crises, retrenchments and realignments" (4) amid an otherwise booming U.S. economy. Domestic attendance at the movies plummeted from eighty million in 1946 (the *annus mirabilis* of the old studio system, though no one knew this at the time) to forty-five million in 1960. In 1946 overseas box-office receipts generated a kind of super-profit even after a Hollywood film had recouped its costs and garnered profits at home. The amounts involved were not trivial: in January 1949, that is, after the double whammy of HUAC in 1947 and the Paramount Decision in 1948 (two of the usual culprits adduced to explain the crises to come), 72% of all films shown in Europe were made in the U.S. This was simply too good to last.

European countries, suffering from severe balance-of-payments inequities with the U.S., responded by tightening exchange regulations and freezing box-office revenues. These had now to be reinvested in Europe, and not repatriated to the U.S. as pure profit. Hollywood studios were thus lumbered with quite large amounts of foreign currency. The solution was outsourcing, though it wasn't yet called outsourcing but "runaway production"—a term coined by disgruntled Hollywood union leaders as they watched jobs slip through their fingers. (Sound familiar?) This way, European currencies could be reinvested in Hollywood movies that would bring in U.S. dollars by being made abroad.

Shandley reports in *Runaway Romances* that "in 1951 Hollywood studios shot three films abroad. The next year the number tripled, and included one production, William Wyler's *Roman Holiday*, in which almost all production and post-production work would be completed in Europe. By 1956 fifty-five productions were shot abroad" (1). Vanessa Schwartz reports in *It's So French!* that "between 1947–63 106 [U.S.] productions requested permission to film" in France alone (22). *Roman Holiday*, for its part, was in Shandley's words "a runaway film in every sense of the word. It was a production financed almost entirely with frozen foreign currency. It was shot entirely on location . . . it provided work for Hollywood professionals who were either blacklisted, on the verge of becoming so, or simply inclined to leave the environment created by HUAC" (44). It was even shot in black-and-white because black-and-white film stock could be bought in the U.K. with Paramount's stockpile of frozen sterling, whereas Technicolor stock had to be paid for in U.S. dollars (23–24).

Roman Holiday was but the tip of the iceberg. "Runaway films of the 1950s to the early 1960s ranged in genre from biblical epics to circus films, from combat films to Westerns to musicals. But, of those films with contemporary European settings . . . [runaways] are almost invariably the 'Romances'" (1) to which Shandley's title refers. "Filming in foreign locations, especially in Europe, offered an opportunity to tell the kinds of stories . . . that could help them lure [U.S.] audiences back into the theaters" (9), even though (or precisely because) theater owners, thanks to the Paramount decision, were now newly free to pick and choose among studio offerings. Runaway production meant fewer but more "quality-oriented" films that would enjoy longer runs and compete better with television, in cinemas to which U.S. suburbanites were increasingly obliged to drive, not walk, for the sake of a night out. Nor indeed does "sophistication" end here. Europe and European experience (even vicarious experience) now "belonged to the cultural capital of the middle class" (91). "In moving productions abroad, filmmakers . . . began developing the story of their own presence abroad . . . [using] the idea of an American living and working abroad, especially in Europe, as a platform from which to investigate the . . . relationship between the new world and the old" (19).

This helps explain a motif of Vanessa Schwartz's *It's So French!*: why at the height of post-war U.S. cultural imperialism some of the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed U.S. films took the form of tributes to France—or, more exactly, to a version of France. Vanessa Schwartz thinks that the globalization of capitalist culture was a more forceful cold war weapon than idealized depictions of "the American way of life" (10) could ever have provided. "Film," she says, "may have been a key vector of Americanization, but its far greater and more enduring contribution has been to the globalization of culture" (5). More generally, globalization itself, like the outsourcing of runaway productions that accompanied and promoted it, was prefigured by Hollywood even before the collapse of European communism.

Schwartz, I submit, might not convince every reader that that what she is invoking here is globalization at all, as opposed to a rather more hegemonic Atlanticism. But whatever

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the whys and wherefores of her broader claims—and the sheer number of U.S. dollars poured into Cinecittà, as reported by Shandley, might or might not bear them out—Schwartz's beautifully produced book (which itself was outsourced to Italy by the University of Chicago Press) is at its strongest when it emphasizes something without which no globalization, and no Atlanticism either, would make much sense: the element of reciprocity. Schwartz duly appreciates the transaction involved in what was, after all, an exchange relationship, no matter how unequally the parties to the exchange may have been. Shandley may appear to cast his net more widely—his remit, unlike Schwartz's, includes Italy and Germany—but he casts it from the singular, fixed position of the U.S. metropole.

Schwartz by contrast concentrates on U.S.–French *rapports* as leading in two directions. If "Hollywood and Paris performed a pas de deux in . . . the marketing of 'Frenchness'"(6), this filmic "investment in 'Frenchness'" was no one-way street (7). What Schwartz calls Hollywood Frenchness films "offered the French government and its officials a flattering mirror in which they could see their own importance reflected in glorious Technicolor" (30); these could see the films as "vehicles for increasing not only the appreciation of French art, but also converting that art into a form of prestige for France" (41–42). It is hardly coincidental that so many of her Frenchness films present France not at but *as* "a particular time and place: Belle Epoque Paris" (20). "Turn of the century clichés of the Can-Can, Moulin Rouge, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and palette, and commercial art posters . . . came to bear particular meanings of Frenchness when shot through a midcentury context." Schwartz does not miss the layerings here: "cinema's heritage" itself was forged "in the crucible of fin-de-siècle France" (212). "These films," she argues, "worked to situate 1950s filmmaking in relation to the generative historical moment of modern visual culture. The films pay homage to France to celebrate film itself as an emblem of modern life and . . . to flaunt cinema's eclipse of earlier, static forms of visual representation. At a moment when television introduced grave concern for the future of filmgoing, these films reasserted the magic of the form . . . By self-consciously foregrounding matters of visual artifice, they [suggested] that entertainment could also be art." That this was a self-serving connection for those Hollywood expats who imagined themselves to be paragons of art-and-entertainment is not lost on Schwartz. "Who better than Hollywood directors to seize on the notion that commercial art was art nevertheless?" (34).

While there is much here that is on the money, it is also (to my mind) rather too hastily put. Schwartz passes over the visual costs involved in shooting runaway films in widescreen formats, where Shandley does not. Early CinemaScope and VistaVision sacrificed depth of field to breadth of image and aspect ratio, while VistaVision could not properly accommodate close-ups either—much to Hitchcock's chagrin on the set of *To Catch a Thief*, a film that fares better in Shandley's account than does Renoir's *French Can-Can* in Schwartz's. Here, Schwartz's eye fails her. She thinks *French Can-Can* looks like all the other Hollywood Belle Epoque films, and can thus be considered as one of them. But this overlooks the echoes of Renoir's earlier life and films that he self-consciously smuggled into *French Can-Can*; it also fails to recognize that Renoir's use of color is much more complex than that found in Schwartz's Frenchness films at large. Some time ago, Pierre Leprohon observed—astutely—that Renoir here and in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, his other significant *retour aux sources*, does not imitate painting: he continues it.

Schwartz is on stronger ground when she observes, more generally, that "fin-de-siècle visual culture, with its illustrated press, its wax museums and posters, was cinematic before the fact" (34). It too was "a technologically mediated and reproductive art" (41); Technicolor "gave the films the look of glossy magazines, thus connecting the visual culture of the late nineteenth century to 1950s photojournalism and filmmaking" (45). These connections were reciprocated and augmented by the Cannes Film Festival and the career of "the first international star who never set foot in Hollywood" (189), Brigitte Bardot, these French creations being the subject matter of Schwartz's second and third chapters.

Few readers will disagree with Schwartz's claim that Cannes helped along a "constitution of a film culture broader than Hollywood's" (88), or that Cannes "shows how important the French were in shaping the direction of world film culture in the postwar era" (58)—Hollywood first established the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film (only) in 1956, for one thing. But she proceeds to add that "[o]nly the French had the confidence, know-how and sheer nerve to challenge [U.S.] know-how after World War II" (58), which to my mind is a highly dubious and overdrawn generalization. Besides, can we really say that Cannes, BB, and the Frenchness films boosted something so nebulous as "globalization"—as opposed to a more finite and manageable trans-Atlanticism?

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BOOK DATA Robert R. Shandley, *Runaway Romances: Hollywood's Postwar Tour of Europe*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009. $59.50 cloth. 234 pages.

Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008. $65.00 cloth; $25.00 paper. 272 pages.